# PALESTINIAN WOMEN

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## Patriarchy and Resistance in the West Bank

Cheryl A. Rubenberg

BOULDER
LONDON

*This book is for Marty and Scott,*
*the two great loves of my life;*
*and for Ayman,*
*for reasons best known to him*

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*—Cheryl A. Rubenberg*

# 1

# Introduction: Studying Gender in West Bank Camp and Village Society

*If we want to understand women's situation, we have to talk to, and about, women individually, not speak about women as a group.*
—Um Hassan, 49, camp resident, married with ten children, "very observant" Muslim, completed fifth grade

*I think women who live in the cities are better off than the ones who live in villages. They are very different. In the villages, women don't even have basic rights. They don't have a life. For example, in the villages, men never take into consideration women's opinions. Women aren't even allowed to sit with their husbands or speak with them. They exist just to produce children. That's all. There are no discussions about or understanding of women on the part of men. I'm certain the situation of women in the cities is better.*
—Um Hatham, 35, married with nine children, village resident, "not very observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

*In our society it's very difficult for women to take their rights. The village and city communities are very different. The villages are more traditional and closed minded toward women. There is more democracy for women in the cities and there are more opportunities for women to work and find recreation. But because villages are small, closed societies, opportunities for women are very limited.*
—Miriam, 42, married with six children, village resident, "very observant" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Fully three-fifths of Palestinian women in the West Bank live in refugee camps and rural villages.[1] Yet, most studies of Palestinian women have focused on the narrow band of urban, politically active, middle-, upper-, and

upper-middle-class women who socially and demographically represent only a fraction of the whole.[2] Thus, most analyses that purport to depict the universal condition of Palestinian women have in fact neglected the greater than 60 percent who dwell in the villages and camps. For this reason, and others, I have chosen to focus on "ordinary" rural and refugee women whose lives are unlike those of urban women of any class.

For the two decades that I had been involved with the question of Palestine before beginning this study, virtually all of my acquaintances, friends, and interactions were with urban (usually political) women. I was familiar with their work, goals, and objectives. Yet, few of them seemed to really understand experientially the situation of rural or refugee women, although they were supposedly working on their behalf. When I began this research, I knew little about refugee camp women and nothing about rural women. I hoped, through this study, to develop close and sustained contact with a variety of village and camp women and to understand their worldviews, perceptions, mores, and emotions. An additional motivation for the work was that I have always been attracted to "oppressed" groups—undoubtedly explaining my lengthy involvement with the Palestinians in both my academic work and political activism.[3] But now I wanted to know about the oppressed of the oppressed.

In this book, I examine the social and economic relations, cultural practices, and power dynamics among West Bank rural village and refugee camp Palestinian women. I attempt to reveal their perceptions of their social world and the positions they occupy in it. I explore how gendered identities are constructed and reproduced, examine social hierarchies and structural inequalities, and investigate the gendered division of labor. I analyze how gender discrimination is deeply entrenched at every level of Palestinian camp and village society—from the home to the school, and out into the labor market and political life. I also describe the varying strategies these women use to maneuver within their socially defined roles to maximize their individual interests.

To convey the world of Palestinian village and camp women, I have relied primarily on their own individual voices and experiences. Perspectives from the sociology of knowledge, cultural anthropology, political economy, gender theory, and analyses of power supplement this approach. Yet, following Erika Friedl's model,[4] I have minimized theoretical analysis and privileged individual women's views of their own existential situations. As women are all actors in their own right, I proceeded from the conviction that to facilitate my respondents' demonstration of agency, it was necessary to encourage them to speak for themselves, to tell their life stories, and to articulate their own perspectives and experiences.

There is enormous heterogeneity among the camp and village women in my research community. Their attitudes and choices on nearly every issue

demonstrate remarkable diversity. On some issues, the variation is such that generalizations are difficult, sometimes impossible, to make. The contrasting voices of West Bank camp and village women (especially those that diverge from common social norms) carry us beyond the apparent stasis of this society and shed light on the myriad ways in which gender politics are played out on a daily basis on the ground. Nevertheless, a number of regular, observable social patterns emerged from the study, and it is these commonalties that constitute the foundation of the book. By focusing on individual women's voices, we learn how women construct themselves and others, how they frame and place themselves in relation to others, and how they negotiate their social reality.[5] Many respondents provided sophisticated and insightful critiques of their culture, traditions, society, and the politics of organized, elite, urban women. That these critiques came from poorly educated (sometimes illiterate), isolated, and oppressed rural and refugee women validated, for me, the central importance both of voice and experience as method, and the significance of focusing on this particular sector of women.

What I have attempted in this book, then, is to analyze the social construction and reproduction of gender roles, relations, and hierarchies among West Bank camp and village Palestinian women as well as to consider the varying strategies of resistance evident in this social sector. In addition, I have developed detailed analyses of the different institutional and discursive realms through which gender hierarchies are constituted, maintained, deformed, reformed, and reproduced.

Palestinian society today is fragmented, isolated, and disarticulated. The Palestine that existed prior to World War I as a distinct region in the Ottoman Empire (and earlier, from well before the dawn of the Common Era[6]), has been colonized, conquered, dismembered, and reduced to a fraction of its original geographical contiguity. As a consequence of the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, that portion of Palestine that the international community had allocated to the Palestinians was vanquished when Jordan occupied the West Bank, Egypt assumed control of the Gaza Strip, and Israel swallowed the Galilee triangle and the coastal strip north of Gaza. Jordan and Israel divided Jerusalem. In total, 418 Palestinian villages were destroyed.[7] The majority of the Palestinians were dispossessed of their homes and herded as destitute refugees to neighboring Arab countries as well as into the West Bank and Gaza. Many thousands more became refugees as a result of the 1967 war.

Today, there are nineteen refugee camps in the West Bank with a combined population of 147,015 individuals, constituting nearly 9 percent of the total population.[8] That total (excluding East Jerusalem), as measured by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 1997, was 1,659,609.[9] In addition, there are 408,042 not registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) living in various locales outside the camps, bringing the number of

refugees in the West Bank to 555,057, or 33 percent of the population.[10] The camps are grossly overcrowded, lack basic amenities (such as adequate running water, electricity, and sewerage), and contain, together with many of the rural villages, the most impoverished sector of Palestinian society.

While the camps were created in 1948 for the refugees, the West Bank villages have existed from time immemorial. There are some 508 rural villages, with populations ranging from 40 to 10,000, scattered across the 2,126 square miles (5,800 square kilometers) of the West Bank's three geographical regions.[11] Village dwellers constitute 54 percent of the West Bank population. There are differences between the social lives of village women and those from the refugee camps, but these are differences in degree. It is important to note that the vast majority of the refugees were originally villagers who carried their village society with them to the camps. Indeed, most camp populations are composed of families who lived together in the same small geographical concentrations as they did before 1948. Village society is often thought to be more "conservative" than refugee society, and there are distinctions in local customs among various villages and camps. But, at the most basic foundations of their social relations and organization and their cultural mores, the two female populations have far more in common with each other than either has with urban women.

The West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem today are totally isolated from each other—physically, economically, and psychologically. Travel between them is akin to crossing (unfriendly) international borders. The Israeli government now requires Palestinians who do not hold "residency" status in Jerusalem to obtain special permits to enter the city for any reason.[12] Both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are riddled with Jewish settlements, settler bypass roads, and military encampments. By December 2000, the West Bank was home to 139 official settlements with approximately 200,000 settlers (a population growth of 72 percent since the signing of the Oslo peace agreement in 1993). Since 1993, three new official and forty-two unofficial settlements have been established.[13] Numerous Israeli military barracks; settler infrastructure; and Israeli-controlled "state land" account for some 74 percent of the total West Bank area.[14] Palestinians in the West Bank live in isolated enclaves cut off from each other by the settlements, infrastructure, and barricaded barbed-wire military installments. They exercise no control over water resources, electricity grids, the disposition of their remaining land, or their personal physical movement.[15]

At the time these data were collected, there was widespread disillusionment with the nature and policies of the nascent Palestine Authority, as well as a general belief among Palestinians that the so-called peace-process was a sham that would not fulfill basic Palestinian political, economic, or social rights. A sense of collective despair, hopelessness, and depression permeated

the West Bank. This communal "psychosis," while altogether understandable given the harsh political and economic realities of everyday life, nevertheless rendered living and working there during this period difficult in numerous ways—especially compared to my previous experiences in the West Bank. It also, naturally, affected each individual with whom I came into contact, including all the women I interviewed. It may account, in part, for what appears to be an unusually harsh situation for women.

The book has eight chapters. Chapter 2 presents a framework for gender roles and explains the theory and method used in the study. The next three chapters look at the private world of women in the domain of their homes and families and includes personal assessments of their own situations. Chapter 3 investigates the basic ingredients that my respondents consistently indicated were fundamental to the construction and reproduction of their identities and experiences as camp and village women. These include kinship, patriarchy, religion (Islam and Christianity), poverty (class/status), and geographic locale, together with their discursive legitimations—relationality and connectivity, the honor code, religious dogma, complementarity, and patriarchal "justifications" for domestic violence and other practices. Chapter 4 analyzes the numerous dimensions of women and the family. It examines how the aforementioned elements are impregnated and reinforced in the family, beginning with the socialization of young girls and proceeding through the family roles and relations that position women throughout their lives. The everyday reality of patriarchy, its intersection with kinship connectivity, and the resultant gendered roles, relations, and division of labor are elucidated. Chapter 5 examines women's articulation of their needs and rights—or rights not taken—together with the tactics and processes through which woman negotiate these major issues. This analysis illuminates the nature and meaning of "relational rights" in the context of patriarchal kinship.

With the understanding that the family provides the template for all other social institutions, the analysis then moves to the public realm. Chapter 6 investigates the gender dynamics in women's experience with the major social institutions—the educational system, the health care system, and the labor sector—that reinforce gender roles and relations and further position camp and village women. Chapter 7 examines camp and village women in the context of politics, both in the nationalist movement and in women's committees before and during the intifada. It illustrates the extent and types of participation by village and camp women and how they encountered and perceived the organized, politically factionalized women's committees. Most important, Chapter 7 discusses at length the current movements for gender equity within my research community—the women's centers in the refugee camps (in particular in Al-Amari) and the Muslim Sisters. Chapter 8 empha-

sizes the interrelationships among the social institutions in conjunction with their legitimating discourses and focuses on the multiple interdependent dynamics of power as they operate at the most minute level of each institution.

## NOTES

1. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Preliminary Report, March 1996* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996), p. 69.

2. The most important exception to this is Julie M. Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); however, while she specifically studies nonelite, "ordinary" refugee camp women, the context is Lebanon rather than Palestine. Some additional exceptions to my generalization include Kitty Warnock, *Land Before Honor: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990); Annelies Moors, *Women, Property and Islam: Palestinian Experiences 1920–1990* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Michael Gorkin and Rafiqa Othman, *Three Mothers, Three Daughters: Palestinian Women's Stories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and, to a lesser extent, Ebba Augustin, ed., *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1993). The problems with focusing on elite women in general are discussed by, among others, Susan S. Davis, *Patience and Power: Women's Lives in a Moroccan Village* (Cambridge, MA: Schenkman Books, 1983), p. 8ff. For a reflection of this elitist phenomena in the literature on Palestinian women, many of which are excellent works in their own right, see Amal Kawar, *Daughters of Palestine: Leading Women of the Palestinian National Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); Orayb Aref Najjar, *Portraits of Palestinian Women* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992); and Staughton Lynd, Sam Bahour, and Alice Lynd, eds., *Homeland: Oral Histories of Palestine and Palestinians* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1994). Other books on Palestinian women that attempt, more or less successfully, to include the experiences of both elite and mass women include Suha Sabbagh, ed., *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Sherna Berger Gluck, *An American Feminist in Palestine: The Intifada Years* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Philippa Strum, *The Women Are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992); and Janet Varner Gunn, *Second Life: A West Bank Memoir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1995). Gunn's book is actually more about Gunn than about Palestinian women.

3. They have dealt with the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people; with the evolution in PLO policies to an acceptance of Israel's existence—a commitment to live beside it in peace in an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem; and with the collusion of the United States and Israel in perpetuating rejectionism of a just settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. See, for example, Cheryl A. Rubenberg, *Israel and the American National Interest: A Critical Examination* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1986), which focuses on the centrality of the question of Palestine to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the United States' unwillingness to acknowledge the Palestinians (or the PLO) as a factor in its

foreign policy on the Middle East. It takes this stance because of Israel's position in special relationship it has with the United States. PLO social institutions are a minor aspect of the book. See also Rubenberg, *The Palestine Liberation Organization: Its Institutional Infrastructure* (Belmont, MA: Institute for Arab Studies, 1983), which examines the social, economic, and cultural institutions of the PLO in Lebanon before the 1982 war.

4. Erika Friedl, "Notes from the Village: On the Ethnographic Construction of Women in Iran," in Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 85–99.

5. Friedl, "Notes from the Village," p. 94.

6. There are many excellent histories of ancient Palestine. See, for example, Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: the Silencing of Palestinian History* (London: Routledge, 1996); Karen Armstrong, *Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1996), esp. pp. 3–125; Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000-Year-Old Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), esp. pp. 3–107.

7. Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

8. PASSIA, *1998* (East Jerusalem, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 1999), p. 229, citing *UNRWA in Figures*, UNRWA Headquarters, September 1998. See also PCBS, *Small Area Population, Revised Estimates for 1996, April 1996* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996), pp. 15–29.

9. PASSIA, *1997,* p. 226 (source: PCBS *Census*, 1997). In 1997, the Palestine Authority Ministry of Local Authority redefined the basis for classification of towns and villages. This has resulted in a reduction of the village population percentage to 53.4 percent; see *Social Monitor* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute-MAS), vol. 1, no. 1 (January 1998): 6–8.

10. PASSIA, *1998*, p. 229, citing *UNRWA in Figures*, UNRWA Headquarters, September 1998. Also see PCBS, *Small Area Population, 1996*, pp. 15–29.

11. PCBS, *Small Area Population, 1996*, pp. 15–29; PCBS, *The Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: District Report Series (No.10), District-by-District Comparative Results, June, 1997* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997), pp. 111–125.

12. For an excellent analysis of the current situation of Palestinians and Jerusalem, see Anita Vitullo, "Israel's Social Policies in Arab Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly File* 1, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 10–30.

13. "Working for a Secure Israel Through Peace," Americans for Peace Now, *Middle East Peace Report* vol. 2, no. 23 (December 4, 2000): 1.

14. Statistics on numbers of settlements and numbers of settlers from the Israeli Interior Ministry, reported in *News from Within* 14, no. 9 (October 1998): 15. Statistics on percentage of land under Israeli control from Radwan Shaban with Osama Hamed, and Ishac Diwan with Ali Khadr, *Development Under Adversity? The Palestinian Economy in Transition*, Executive Summary (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute-MAS), p. 4. By October 2000, the number of Jewish settlers in the West Bank had risen to over 200,000. See Amira Hass, "Israel Has Failed That Test," *Ha'aretz* (Jerusalem, Israeli daily, English), October 18, 2000.

15. See, for example, LAW, *Apartheid, Bantustans, Cantons: The ABC of the Oslo Accords* (Jerusalem: Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment [LAW], 1998).

# 2

# Gender Roles: A Framework

This study is concerned with how gender roles and relations have been constructed by determinate social institutions and how they have been formed, deformed, transformed, and reproduced from the perspective of the women who live within this institutional framework. It is a case study of a specific group of women at a particular historical moment that relies overwhelmingly on the voices and experiences of the women in the study. As a context-dependent, microlevel analysis, it minimizes theory without negating its importance.[1] Rather, it is my hope that this study will contribute to the empirical base from which future comparative and theoretical work on Palestinian, Arab, and other third world women can be built. The text complements, for example, Julie Peteet's analysis of "ordinary" refugee camp women in Lebanon in the context of mass political mobilization.[2]

Here, I examine the lives of "ordinary" women in West Bank refugee camps and rural villages against a backdrop of overwhelming mass despair, disillusionment, and hopelessness. The context emerges from the failure of the intifada and the "peace process" to bring about a realization of Palestinian political rights; the unsuccessful efforts of the women's movement to achieve changes in traditional patriarchal roles and relations; disenchantment with the nature and policies of the Palestine Authority; and the growing poverty in the West Bank. The method of "voice and experience" and the selection of "ordinary" women require some elaboration.[3] Also, the concepts that frame this study necessitate some theoretical explanation.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

Gender is a culturally constructed phenomenon—a constellation of signifying practices that the sexed body learns to perform during socialization. It is first derived from women's childbearing capacities and is then, in turn, codified and reinforced in the sexual division of labor. Women not only reproduce children; they also reproduce social systems and power relations—even those that oppress them. Nira Yuval-Davis argues that gender should be understood not as a real social difference between men and women, but "as a mode of discourse which relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological differences as opposed to their economic positions or their membership in national or religious collectivities."[4] Joan Scott defines gender more concisely as "the social organization of sexual difference."[5]

Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi argue that the importance of voice and experience in studying gender resides in its ability to produce less partial, less essentialized, and less distorted understanding of specific women in particular places.[6] They and Dorothy Smith stress, however, that the analyst of gender must not overlook the coercive power contained in the relations of ruling in all social structures and institutions. All emphasize that only by combining the personal together with the social can we comprehend how and, more important, why such power relations ultimately transcend the women themselves.[7] Among West Bank camp and village women, the relationship between individual and society is pivotal to the maintenance of the status quo. Society, by identifying the honor of the family with the behavior of its individual members and, conversely, marking individuals according to social evaluations of their family's honor, significantly limits the choices and behavior of women. Michel Foucault's emphasis on the "technologies of power" alerts us to the fact that knowledge and practice are intimately associated in the creation of social relations based on domination, and that relations, processes, supports, and strategies obfuscate hegemony.[8] Among Palestinian camp and village women, for example, the "knowledge" of shame and the constraints on behavior that its fear creates—together with society's vigilance, gossip, and ostracism—define the boundaries of their social lives. Pierre Bourdieu's analysis of "symbolic" power that is located within language, religion, education, and ideology facilitates the understanding of "relationality" in this social world.[9] Suad Joseph has developed the concepts of relational connectivity, relational rights, and relational modes of thinking that are critical to understanding the power dynamics in identity, kinship, the conceptualization of "rights," and the character of all social interactions among Palestinian camp and village women. Comprehending symbolic power in terms of a "relational mode of thinking" illustrates how the relations of domination and oppression are transformed into "equality" through "complementarity" and

illuminates the reality behind other ideological constructs that position and subjugate rural and refugee women.[10]

As Foucault has demonstrated elsewhere, power is not merely a relation of domination by one person or group over another. Rather, power circulates, or functions, in the form of a chain. Individuals are always simultaneously being subjected to and exercising power: They are not only its passive recipients; they are also its agents. Put differently, power is productive as well as oppressive. It produces discourses; it compels individuals to perform—to participate in role designations and to accept and adhere to given norms and values. The manifold relations of power that dominate and oppress cannot be established, transmitted, and reproduced without the production and circulation of discourses or ideological constructs. The effective exercise of power requires a complementary discourse of "truth" or "knowledge." The role of such discourses of truth is to legitimize power inequalities. In Palestinian camps and villages, I found that many women willingly participate in the dominant power relation (patriarchy), accept socially designated roles, and internalize and use various socially constructed discourses to explain why things are and to give meaning to their experiences. I found other women, however, who reject these discourses—especially those involving tradition and culture—and clearly understand their utility in maintaining the relations of domination and subordination in the status quo. Moreover, many respondents deeply resent their socially assigned roles, although they feel constrained by society to perform them. Still others refuse to participate in the patriarchal dynamic by declining the privilege of matriarchy at that point in their life cycle when exercising it would be possible.

The analysis of the multiple aspects and functions of power is a crucial dimension of this work as a means of discovering how Palestinian camp and village women as individuals are progressively constituted and reconstituted through forces and factors operating at every level of society.[11] It helps demonstrate how the political imperatives of gender condition and circumscribe the relationship of Palestinian camp and village women to the institutions in which they live. The focus on power also expands comprehension of how gender is socially constructed, legitimated, deformed, re-formed, maintained, and reproduced in this society.[12]

The core of gender inequality in camp and village society lies in the repression of female sexuality. A woman's virginity and chastity are considered the single, if not the only, most important aspect of her moral worth. The entire social order is organized to control her body. Women are taught that their bodies are shameful and are kept in ignorance about every aspect of them, from the changes of puberty through the basics of sexual function, extending even through the health aspects of the genitourinary system. Analyzing power advances understanding of how its mechanisms operate to

repress female sexuality, what the economic and political utility of such repression is, what discourses legitimize it, and what disciplines reify the discourses.

## FRAMING THE STUDY OF GENDER

The voice and experience approach is not intended, as noted, to negate the importance of theory, but rather to ground it at every juncture in the subject I would have it serve. Yet, while voice and experience are at the heart of this project, a singular analytic approach is insufficient. Thus, I have chosen a frame of elements that emerged from the interviews as the most appropriate for a comprehensive evaluation of the lives of women in this particular social milieu. These elements include the structures and discourses of identity formation and maintenance, the major private and public institutions that females traverse from birth through death, and the external forces that impinge on their lives. None of these elements are static, nor are women's places in them fixed and unchanging. Nevertheless, they provide a basis from which to proceed.

One of the most important insights I gained from my research on Middle Eastern women is that there are no neutral concepts. As Gocek and Balaghi point out, identity, power, culture, kinship, patriarchy, tradition, and religion can all be used by the Western scholar to stereotype and homogenize Middle Eastern women, and they can be dismissed by the third world scholar as irrelevant. Thus, my primary intellectual task in developing this work was to problematize each of these concepts when applying them to the research community I studied. I am aware that as a Westerner studying a very different society, my own infinite cultural tracings inevitably color my insights and analyses. Although I have tried to be conscious of those markings, I cannot completely erase them. This work, then, is a compendium of both the voices that related their understanding of their world and of my own interventions in the subsequent analyses. In these pages, our texts are inextricably intertwined. Yet, in the final reckoning, only the voices of the women must endure. They are this work's finest contribution**.**

### *Patriarchy*

Patriarchy, while unsuitable as a universal framework for analyzing women's oppression, is highly appropriate for understanding women's position in West Bank Palestinian camp and village society.[13] Patriarchy as a type of power relation originates in the domestic realm. Female subordination is intimately tied to the dynamics of family life, which then acts as a template for the reproduction of patriarchal relations in other realms of social life.[14] Patriarchy may

be understood as "the privileging of males and seniors and the mobilization of kin structures, kin morality, and kin idioms to legitimate and institutionalize gendered and aged domination."[15] The basic relations in a patriarchal system are control by, and submission to, those who rank higher in terms of age and gender: duties and obligations are strictly defined along these two axes.[16] Additionally, patriarchy defines a specific kind of discourse and practice as well as a distinctive mode of economic and political organization.[17]

Palestinian patriarchy, in the particular context of West Bank rural village and refugee camp society, has been highly deleterious to women. It is a system for monopolizing resources, maintaining kinship status, reproducing the patriline, controlling women's sexuality and bodies, legitimizing violence, regulating education to reproduce the roles and relations socialized in the family, focusing health care exclusively on maternity and procreation, and limiting women's access to the labor market as well as defining the types of work in which women may engage. Women's experiences with the Palestine National Movement and women's organizations have also been adversely affected by patriarchy.

The institutionalization of hierarchies of age and gender signifies that older men have more power than do younger men, and men in general have more power than women. Patriarchy, however, does not preclude the possibility of women assuming dominant positions. Because women's power tends to increase as they proceed through the life cycle, in particular after they become postmenopausal and after the death of their mothers-in-law, some women can and do assume powerful roles in the West Bank patriarchal system.[18] This transformation usually occurs by women drawing on the connective claims to their children, typically their sons. We shall encounter numerous matriarchal mothers-in-law and the oppression this powerful role inflicts on young wives (and their husbands). Matriarchy, however, is merely the other side of the coin of classic patriarchy, although even as a matriarch, a woman will usually be required to defer to a senior male—husband, father, brother, or even son. Moreover, the existence of the Palestinian matriarch does not alter the fundamental dynamics, roles, and obligations of patriarchy.[19] Ironically, as Deniz Kandiyoti notes, the anticipation of inheriting authority and power as a postmenopausal matriarch produces in some women a thorough internalization of patriarchal ideology.[20] Gerda Lerner clearly articulates this dynamic:

> The system of patriarchy can only function with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other by defining "respectability" and "deviance" according to women's sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women.[21]

### *Kinship*

Kinship, or the functionally extended family, is the most important social formation in West Bank camp and village society. Palestinians construe their lives primarily in terms of the people and groups to whom they are related by blood—that is, paternal agnates (although maternal blood relations are often important too). In this social world, kinship connectivity shapes individual identity and the management of everyday social relations through a group of precepts that both define identity and legitimize personal connections. Kinship authenticates identity through the differentiation of I from other based on *garaba* and *gharibah* (kin and non-kin). It is therefore the most significant factor in keeping women isolated, separated, and disinclined to unite with other women in social organizations that could work for gender equality. Kinship also confers moral qualities and character, and it serves to tie people to the past and to bind them in the present. Palestinians inhabit an intensely social world in which individuals' activities and relationships are paramount; and, as in Lila Abu-Lughod's bedouin community, they typically prefer the company of other kin to solitude.[22]

### *Identity*

Identity among West Bank camp and village women is a relational phenomenon growing out of kinship connectivity. Yet, this experience neither proceeds from nor produces an essential difference between men and women. Rather, as Judith Butler argues, identity is a discursive practice—unique for its aspiration to the status of the always-already signified (and given), yet which continues to actively signify every minute of every day as it circulates within various interlocking discourses.[23] The real issue in politics is at the site where power constrains human subjects by articulating for them an identity and a role in society's division of labor. Moreover, the vicissitudes of identity formation are not a passing trial or an adolescent affair; rather they are a continuous lifelong process. The women in my research community demonstrate repeatedly that kinship connectivity in the context of patriarchy is both the core of their identity and their social reality. Moreover, as Butler argues with regard to identity and patriarchy, "If the subject is constituted by power, that power does not cease at the moment it is constituted, for that subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and again."[24] The mechanics of identity maintenance and reproduction must be ongoing if society is to ensure the continuation of its institutions and roles.

Identity involves socially constructed categories that attempt to "fix" subjects in what would be otherwise diverse and fluid roles.[25] Recognizing the signifying processes by which these ends are achieved alerts us to the fact that

an exclusive focus on gender identity or concentrating solely on "the woman" constrains our understanding of gender rather than deepening it.[26] An emphasis on identity alone deflects the political vision that would articulate an understanding of the self in relation to others. In the end, a concentration solely on gender identity elides class, religious, and other identities and finally reinforces the binary divisions between men and women.[27]

To move beyond the constraints of identity politics, it is necessary to attend to the multiform dimensions within gender. Gender is not static but shaped by many forces, and it contains a variety of components that are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary. The individual women in this research community have a diverse set of identities and, even among this relatively small group, not all women agree on the values that should or do inform those identities. Also, in West Bank social reality, gender, kinship, and patriarchy are overlapping discourses. None can be treated as analytically prior to the other, because they are realized together in the particular cultural, economic, and social systems of this locale.[28] The analysis of identity, then, considers the multidimensional perspectives or social forces that define the individual woman in her local social space. Such an approach accommodates as well an analysis of the play of power in gender politics—its origins, causes, and consequences.[29] For example, this approach affords an illumination of the central importance of woman's reproductive role in the discourses of kinship, nationalism, cultural authenticity, and political Islam as well as in the structure and content of the educational system, in the health care sector's virtually exclusive focus on maternity and child care, and in the labor sector's restriction of women's participation and choice of employment. As such, it exposes the tightly integrated institutional and discursive matrix that fixes women's position in society.[30]

### *Religion*

The fundamental social institutions and practices—kinship, patriarchy, class, and notions about moral worth—that characterize West Bank Palestinian camp and village society transcend religious distinctions. Indeed, much of the behavior and discourse that Western analysts consider Islamic actually arise from traditional norms, values, and customary law (*'urf*), and is often even contrary to Islamic Sharia (religious law). The inclusion of a Christian community in this study validates these assertions. Nevertheless, the importance of the discourse of Islam in the social construction of gender identities and gender oppression among Muslim women in West Bank society cannot be neglected—nor can the ideologies of Greek Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism among Christian women. In both cases, religion serves as a critical component of women's identity as well as providing highly significant legitima-

tions for the subordination, oppression, and positioning of women.[31] It further separates camp and village women and binds them to exclusive groups. For example, in Abud village (with a population of approximately 2,000, half Christian and half Muslim), Christian and Muslim females, even in the public school, have virtually no social interaction.

### *Class*

Class provides an additional frame for this study.[32] From a quantitative perspective, according to the most recent statistics, 22.5 percent of the Palestinian population (West Bank and Gaza) live in absolute poverty.[33] Another 40–50 percent live just above this line. Data from a variety of sources demonstrate that poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, and other indices of destitution are concentrated in the camps and villages. For example, in the West Bank, 18 percent of those people living in villages fall below the poverty line, as do 14 percent of camp dwellers.[34] Relative to the urban poor, in both the villages and camps several factors mitigate poverty—for example, UNRWA in the camps, land for home cultivation in the villages, and extended families in both. Yet, while poverty may not be as absolute as among the urban poor, my research community as a whole is near the bottom of the class scale. The implications of living in such destitution are enormous. Poverty can determine the extent of a girl's education, her age at marriage, a family's living arrangement (and the number of extended relatives living together), the quality of health care, the number of children, access to the labor force, and so on. Moreover, women are distinctly positioned and isolated by their class identification.

### *Locale*

The West Bank is a highly fragmented social system. There are cleavages between rural/urban, refugees/residents, south/central/north regions, Christian/Muslim, religious/secular, locals/returnees, and among villages, *hamayel* (clans), classes, and political factions. The persistence of local identities and loyalties, the result of a variety of historical and political factors—together with other socially detrimental causes and consequences—has impeded the development of a grassroots class-based movement or a broad-based movement for women's emancipation.

### *External Context*

Gender relations and positions among Palestinian camp and village women have not occurred in a vacuum or been shaped solely by internal social forces. Dispossession, dislocation, occupation, and the nationalist struggle to achieve

political independence and to assert a national identity have also buffeted them. Women have been an important sign, or marker, for the political goals of the Palestine National Movement as well as in the Islamist reaction to it. The Palestinian confrontations with Zionism, settler-colonialism, imperialism, and newer, more sophisticated forms of foreign intervention have intersected, complicated, and contributed to both an embryonic feminist project for emancipation and the mutilation and deformation of the potential for women's liberation. The 1994 arrival of the Palestine Authority (PA)[35] and the extensive participation of foreign-funded nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)[36] in Palestinian society have also had a damaging impact on gender issues.

As a consequence of the 1948 *nakba* (disaster), traditional structures and practices—kinship organization, patterns of labor migration, class relations, and others—were deleteriously affected. The *nakba* also created the refugee problem, which is manifest today in the more than 500,000 refugees eking out an existence in the West Bank. The 1967 Israeli occupation, which continues in myriad dimensions, imposed a systematic edifice of repression that has had a profoundly negative impact on the entire Palestinian economy and society. Israel's absolute control of the West Bank economy and of all its land and water resources resulted in a radically diminished agricultural sector, while Israel simultaneously prohibited the growth of an industrial sector. Also, Israel permitted almost no expansion of either the number of schools or health care facilities despite extraordinary Palestinian population growth. These policies have been detrimental to women's access to education and health care and to participation in the labor force. Almost 50 percent of women drop out of school before completing twelfth grade; health-care facilities are inadequate, severely maldistributed, and injurious to women's health; and women today constitute no more than 14 percent of the labor force. Israel's water restrictions have also been harmful to women's health; and through its control of the land, Israel has pursued a systematic policy of house demolitions—a pernicious practice that is particularly difficult on women. The effects of such policies (in some cases the policies themselves) still exist. The intifada—the indigenous uprising against the occupation and Israel's massive military response—was also ultimately disadvantageous for women.[37]

The arrival of the PA, with an authoritarian political culture quite distinct from that which had been progressively developing in the West Bank under Israeli occupation, has been injurious both to society and women in numerous ways. Institutions of civil society—some embryonic, some remarkably developed—together with a discourse on democratization characterized West Bank society during the 1970s and 1980s. PA repression has been highly corrosive of these institutions, while hopes for political democracy have come to an end. The West Bank sociopolitical scene in the late 1990s presents a chilling pic-

ture. The PA exercises only limited autonomy over a small portion of the West Bank, and it does not possess any aspect of sovereignty. Nevertheless, it has established all the institutions of Hisham Sharabi's classic neopatriarchal state.[38] Even more detrimental to Palestinian society and to women in particular is the PA's determined revival of tribalism and its emphasis on kinship ties and loyalties. These policies are leading to increased factionalism and tension, greater utilization of tribal or clannish law, and the distribution of scarce resources based on clan or *hamulah* loyalty to President Arafat.[39]

## METHOD

The primary methodological dilemma faced by anyone engaged in fieldwork is the issue of intersubjectivity, the relationship between researcher and research community, the political-cultural worlds to which each belongs, and the ultimate purposes of the research project.[40]

The most troubling issue for me involved the ethical concern that I, a privileged Western woman, was "studying" Palestinian camp and village women. This discomfort was compounded by the fact that their particular external political oppression is a direct consequence of my government's policies. Why should any Palestinian woman share her life with an American woman? I was ever aware of this asymmetry and contradiction. Additionally, I was plagued by my intrusion on the women I interviewed—on their time, their space, and their privacy—while I could not in any way improve their lives. There were occasions when, on completing their discussions with me, a woman would ask, "Can you help me?" This raised, for me, the issue of the fundamental purpose of my project—a deeply disquieting question that I have yet to satisfactorily answer to myself.

As for the relationship between researcher and research community, I was extremely fortunate in engaging a significant majority of my respondents in highly intimate conversations. Despite the deeply rooted societal taboo against speaking of family matters outside the family and the extremity of punishments for those women who do, the majority of women I interviewed were completely open with me in discussing the most personal of issues. I believe the main reason for this was that as a foreigner, I was perceived as trustworthy because I would not gossip locally or reveal any confidences. Talking to me seemed almost cathartic for some respondents who poured out their misery with little prodding. With most women, however, it took some time and effort to assure them that our conversation was confidential, and even then many remained guarded. Still, I believe I was offered an enormous amount of very personal information. Perhaps it was also, in part, due to my natural ease with camp and village women, growing out of my prior experi-

ences in Gaza. Also, the fact that I was a mature, 53-year-old woman who dressed very conservatively and understood the basic social rules of speech and behavior undoubtedly helped. Moreover, the fact that I had a physician-husband continuously in residence and a 24-year-old son who visited periodically meant I was "family oriented." Ultimately, however, I do not know with certainty why so many women entrusted me with so much personal, potentially damaging information. But I am enormously grateful for the information they shared.

In addition to the richness of the individual interviews, I was fortunate to develop close, personal relations with a group of women from Al-Am'ari refugee camp. For the duration of my study (two years), I lived near Al-Am'ari. After several months, the directors of the women's center in the camp asked me to give a weekly class in English, which I did, as a volunteer. As a result, I was invited to the camp for numerous social occasions—*iftar* (the daily meal that breaks the fast) during Ramadan, the *Eid* (feast) after Ramadan, weddings, wakes, and others. I often spent time in the center just chatting with the women and occasionally participated in some project in which they were engaged. Once, I spent a full day with a group of women making *sepaneyeh* (spinach pies) in preparation for a luncheon they were having the following day for women from the other "middle" camps. In any event, over time, I came to know the extended families, men as well as women, of several of my interviewees and became acquainted with numerous other women in the camp including many who disapproved of the women's center. At some point I began to feel a part of the textual life of Al-Am'ari society—its gossip, scandals, secrets, visiting rituals, and so on. This informal contact, an irregular form of "participant observation," vastly enriched my understanding of Palestinian society and culture.

This study draws on both qualitative data (interviews) and quantitative data. In the remainder of this chapter, I describe the methods used to collect both types of data.

## QUALITATIVE DATA (INTERVIEWS)

### *Choice of Camps and Villages*

The West Bank is broadly divided into three geographic regions: the north, with Nablus as the leading urban center; the south, with Hebron as the main city; and the central region, with the Ramallah/Al-Bireh metropolis as the key urban conglomerate. Each area, at least in popular folklore, has a distinct character, and I was interested in discovering if there were any remarkable differences in the lives of women from different regions. Thus, I randomly

chose a village and a refugee camp from each area, plus one Christian village: in the north, Sabastya village and Balata refugee camp; in the south, Halhoul village and Al-Aroub refugee camp; and in the center, Kubar village and Al-Am'ari refugee camp. The Christian village is Abud, situated in the central region close to the Green Line. While from the perspective of an outsider there appeared to be no significant dissimilarities among the three regions from a cultural or social standpoint, both the north and the south are significantly disadvantaged in the distribution of health, employment, educational, and other resources.

Christian communities are scattered throughout the three regions (though there are more in the central area as compared to the north or south), but the total Christian population today constitutes only 3 percent of the whole—down from 10 percent at the turn of the century.[41] This decline has been due to lower birth rates and greater migration within the Christian community. Nevertheless, Christians have and continue to play an important part in the social, political, and economic life of the West Bank. I included them in my research community for this reason and because, as noted above, I wanted to determine if the prevailing social norms, values, and practices are related more to culture and tradition than to religion per se.

### *Sample Selection*

The segment of women I chose to study is not homogeneous. It contains numerous social distinctions within itself, such as locale (village and camp), religion and religiosity, educational attainment, employment, marital status, age, and economic status; most of the women fall into a broad category of "poor," though several could be considered "middle-class." Additionally, it does not represent Palestinian women of any class living in Gaza, in camps outside the country, in Israel and East Jerusalem, or in West Bank urban areas. Nonetheless, I believe that observing and analyzing village and camp women sheds significant understanding on the multiple arenas in which power relations are structured, reproduced, negotiated, and transformed among women of similar class/status positions throughout Palestinian society as a whole and in the Arab world in general. In the growing literature on women in the Arab world, Palestinian women have been consistently underrepresented—perhaps because their political status in the global system remains undefined. Moreover, as noted in the Introduction, those studies that have examined Palestinian women have tended to focus on urban, politically active, and middle- and upper-middle-class women.[42]

In addition, prior to engaging camp and village women (the focus of my work from the outset), I interviewed individually a group of urban women consisting of nineteen professional activists—the progressive leaders of

women's institutions, research centers, and legal aid organizations in Ramallah, East Jerusalem, Hebron, and Nablus. After subsequent interviews with the rural and camp women, however, I came to understand that the policy agendas advocated by the urban organizations (mainly U.S. or internationally funded NGOs) bore little or no resemblance to what village and camp women articulated as their problems or how to resolve them. Further, not more than a handful of the 175 women I worked with in the camps and villages had ever heard of the urban women's organizations (excepting the now largely inactive women's committees), and fewer still had made use of their services. When I raised the agendas and programs of the urban organizations, the majority of the women among my research community disagreed with their approaches and tactics even if they supported the goals. The social distance between urban women, on the one hand, and village and camp women, on the other, is enormous. The realization of the magnitude of this distance further inspired my interest in "ordinary" women.

Of less significance, but still of note, are my observations concerning the actual lives of some of the urban women activists. Informal social contact with a number of them suggested that regardless of their secular dress, university degrees, and professional employment, within their homes and in relation to the males of authority therein, many are also constrained by the same basic practices, institutions, and discourses that confront the village and camp women. On the other hand, I did encounter a very few exceptional urban Palestinian women who are able to live outside the confines of socially permissible space. Each combines some mixture of the advantages of class, advanced education (usually foreign), professional employment, small nontraditional/nonextended families, and unique marriage arrangements. Yet, while enjoying great personal empowerment and engagement in a vibrant women's culture, these women are marginalized in Palestinian society.[43] The incorporation of this group of women into my analysis seemed unnecessarily problematic and potentially misleading.

Lower-class urban women face a myriad of traditional social forces and factors exacerbated by the vagaries and hardships of urban life. They deserve a comprehensive analysis that I simply could not incorporate in the original definition of my study. In general, I think it is fair to say that village and camp women have fewer choices, opportunities, and resources, and face more social and economic pressure, than do urban women of any class. Their lives are certainly more confined and circumscribed.

### *Identification of Respondents*

Typically, in each locale, once one connection was established, either through women's centers or chance encounters, that woman in turn facilitated intro-

ductions to another one or two women, and each of them to others. Occasionally, this resulted in the informative coincidence of interviewing mothers and daughters or sisters. Working through women's centers rendered this networking infinitely easier. This approach was unsuccessful only once.[44]

In each locale, I interviewed twenty-five women, stipulating only age differentiation. In all, I interviewed 175 women. My age categories were women 50 years and older; women in their forties; women in their thirties; women in their twenties, and women younger than 20—the range here was about 15–19. I was not successful in every location with my exact desired age distribution, but with the seven sites taken together, I achieved a good approximation, although women between 50 and 60 are somewhat underrepresented.

### *Interview Method*

All interviews were conducted in Arabic with the assistance of a translator. My Arabic is passable for ordinary conversations, but I wanted to be certain that I did not misunderstand anything said, and that I grasped all the nuances of expression that women might use in discussing delicate issues. Present at each interview were the respondent, the translator, and myself. With the respondents' permission, I taped the interview and subsequently transcribed it. The majority of interviews, which were semistructured and open-ended, lasted from three to four hours—some were longer, a few shorter depending on the loquaciousness of the respondent and her willingness to discuss personal aspects of her life. I allowed the woman being interviewed to talk as much as possible (with encouragement here and there), and I believe I learned more from the digressions, asides, and stories than I did from answers to my questions. Indeed, while some analysts are critical of the "life story" approach,[45] I found, like Erika Friedl, that when people think and talk about themselves—about their lives—they naturally do so in stories: "Things and people and relationships are understood, structured, and remembered in narratives." Thus, as did Friedl, by adopting a narrative style to capture these stories, I attempted to recreate a level of reality in which "women deal with the quintessential challenges of life such as survival, meaning, inconsistency, both practically and philosophically."[46]

At the outset I assured (and often reassured) each respondent of the confidentiality of our discussion. In the text, all names have been changed, and I have provided as little identifying information as possible. I began the interview by asking a brief set of specific questions: name, age, marital status, number of children, years of education, religion and religiosity, employment status, and economic situation. This was followed by general questions about the woman's life: childhood, adolescence, education, marriage, etc. For example, I asked questions such as: What are your most vivid memories of your child-

hood? Did you like school? Did you have friends in school? Tell me something about your family. How was your relationship with your mother; father? How did your marriage come about? What has your married life been like? With each answer, I attempted to probe more deeply and to allow the woman to lead me in telling me about the things that were most important to her. Toward the end of the interview, I shifted to questions that were more general, such as: How do you see the situation of Palestinian women? What are the main problems women face here? What do women need most? Do women take all their rights in this society? Whenever possible, I used the information gleaned from the personal histories to give meaning to the more general questions. Also, I tried to ask questions in as many differently phrased ways as possible, in order to elicit as much information as I could and to ascertain women's real attitudes by cross-checking the answers. This technique elicited a great deal of information, and I believe it compensated for the language difference. For example, one woman who initially told me that she was forced to marry a man by her father later revealed that she agreed to marry because she wanted to get out of her family's house. Since such contradictions were frequent, I carefully studied and restudied each interview before using an individual woman's comments on a particular issue. I concluded each interview by asking the respondent what her personal hopes and dreams were for herself in the future. In addition, I asked if there was anything she wanted to ask about me.

The two most difficult questions concerned religiosity and economic situation. I felt that it was not valid for me to make an evaluative judgment about either of these issues even though the most common answers to both were "average." Thus, I simply recorded the words the women used to describe themselves. As the interviewing process progressed and I talked with more women in depth about their religious beliefs and practices and the particularities of their economic circumstances, I developed a set of (admittedly subjective) assumptions to ascertain distinctions among my respondents. I believe that religiosity—whether Christian or Islamic—colors women's attitudes and perceptions. As such, I believe it is important to have some idea about the depth and intensity of an individual woman's religious convictions. The religion and religiosity (as well as age, educational attainment, marital status, and residence—village or camp) of each woman is identified in the text. Class is even more difficult to accurately describe; again, I simply recorded the women's answers to "How would you describe your economic situation?"[47] In the end, however, I did not include respondents' answers to this question in most text identifications. On the one hand, in the majority of cases, it did not seem to have relevant bearing on their answers. On the other hand, fundamentally, this research community is overwhelmingly "poor."

In the refugee camps, the majority of interviews were conducted at women's centers, though they often spilled over into homes for coffee or

lunch. In the villages, almost all the interviews were conducted in respondents' homes and typically involved lunch. That is because, with the exception of Halhoul village, the villages do not have women's centers.

With most women, I preferred conducting interviews in the women's centers, where mothers-in-law did not interject themselves and have to be politely expelled and where neighbors did not come visiting wanting to know all about the *ajnabi'yya* (foreigner); indeed, there were few interruptions of any sort, and generally the women were less distracted and more fully engaged in the discussions. On the other hand, there were occasions when the privacy of a woman's home seemed to evoke both an atmosphere of safety that provoked openness and an emotional context that elicited intimacy and directness. Moreover, in women's homes, there were always breaks for tea, coffee, and often lunch. At such periods, I often fretted to myself about the need to be mindful of time. In retrospect, however, the informality of these occasions afforded me invaluable opportunities to observe women in their natural environment, and these observations vastly expanded my understanding of their social worlds.

For nine months, I worked with one translator. When she left for England to study for her Ph.D., I engaged a second woman. Both were originally village women who connected innately and deeply with village and, by extension, camp culture and society. And both of them initially reacted with horror when in the course of questions I asked an interviewee: Tell me about your wedding night—was he gentle with you? How has it been since then? Do you enjoy it? Do you ever initiate it? Does he ever force you? Both translators were single, in their mid-thirties, and, though personally chaste, not unexposed to life. But they could not comprehend asking such questions, and initially both refused: "You can't ask such a thing! Don't you know anything about this society!" When I insisted, they apologized profusely to the respondent, distanced themselves from me, stammered out the questions and the answers, and appeared totally chagrined. This attitude persisted with each for well over a month. Even more interesting was the fact that with a few exceptions, the interviewees not only answered such questions, but also often volunteered additional information. It was a learning process for all of us; however, after completing the research, I discovered that other analysts of both Palestinian and Arab societies had also successfully discussed sexual matters with female respondents.[48]

## QUANTITATIVE DATA

This study of gender among West Bank rural and camp women is broadened by the use of quantitative data. The data supplement the qualitative method-

ology of voice and experience and the various explanatory frames. Much of this data is newly generated and has never before been brought together in a comprehensive analysis. As a consequence of living in the West Bank for two years, I had the opportunity to evaluate virtually all the recently published studies on various aspects of Palestinian society produced by a variety of NGOs, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), research institutions, women's organizations, and others. Throughout, I have tried to augment the respondents' voices and my qualitative analyses with quantitative data where applicable.

The introduction of quantitative data, however, poses certain problems. In the absence of a Palestinian governing authority prior to 1994, there were no reliable Palestinian statistics on anything—not even basic census data. Since the arrival of the Palestine Authority, the PCBS has undertaken a yeoman's effort in the collection of reliable data across a wide range of issues. At the same time, the NGOs and research centers have engaged in more systematic and expanded research. Yet, given the absence of reliable statistical research prior to 1994, there are almost no bases against which to compare the present data or ascertain trends. As such, the statistical material tends to give the research a static perspective that is precisely what I have attempted to avoid in the analysis. I can only hope that the presentation of the quantitative data at this time will afford future researchers the basis for comparisons and assessments of future trends.

The second major problem with the data is that differing sources—reputable organizations as well as independent researchers engaged in microstudies—often provide different figures for the same indices, measuring the same thing in the same time frame. I have attempted to evaluate these variations as logically and dispassionately as possible and to be consistent throughout the text in the use of such quantitative data.

## NOTES

1. This perspective is utilized and discussed in more depth in Deniz Kandiyoti, "Contemporary Feminist Scholarship and Middle East Studies"; Rema Hammami, "Commentary: Feminist Scholarship and the Literature on Palestinian Women"; and Lisa Taraki, "Commentary: Feminist Scholarship and Research on Palestinian Society," in *Feminist Scholarship,* Gender and Society: Working Paper No. 1 (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, June 1995).

2. Julie M. Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1991).

3. This approach in general has been inspired by Erika Friedl, "Notes from the Village: On the Ethnographic Construction of Women in Iran," in Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity, and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 85–99.

4. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 9.

5. Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), p. 2. Also see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 143ff.; Joan W. Scott, "Experience," in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds. *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 22–42; and Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" in Butler and Scott, *Feminists Theorize the Political,* p. 13.

6. Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, "Introduction: Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East Through Voice and Experience," in Gocek and Balaghi, *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East*, pp. 2–3. They refer to the work of Dorothy Smith, which has also been very helpful to me: *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987); and *Texts, Facts, and Femininity: Exploring the Relations of Ruling* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

7. Gocek and Balaghi, "Introduction," pp. 3–4; Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic,* p. 88.

8. Gocek and Balaghi, "Introduction," p. 8, citing Mark Poster, "A New Kind of History," in Poster, *Foucault, Marxism, and History* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 149–150; Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality,* Vol. 1: *An Introduction* (New York, Pelican Press, 1981), p. 92.

9. Gocek and Balaghi, "Introduction," pp. 8–9, citing Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory* 7, no. 1: 17. Also see Pierre Bourdieu, (translated by Richard Nice), *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

10. Suad Joseph, "Gender and Relationality Among Arab Families in Lebanon," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 3 (1993): 468; Joseph, "Problematizing Gender and Relational Rights: Experiences from Lebanon," *Social Politics* (Fall 1994): 271–285; Joseph, "Introduction: Theories and Dynamics of Gender, Self, and Identity in Arab Families," in Joseph, ed., *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self and Identity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), pp. 1–17; Joseph, "Connectivity, Love and Power in the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon," in Joseph, *Intimate Selving*, pp. 113–140.

11. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures: Lecture Two, 14 January 1976," in Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings: Michel Foucault, 1972–1977*, collected and edited by Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), pp. 92–108.

12. This overall analysis owes much to the insights of Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation*, pp. 1–25.

13. See, for example, Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

14. Marcia C. Inhorn, *Infertility and Patriarchy: The Cultural Politics of Gender and Family Life in Egypt* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 4. Also see Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective," in Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gende*r (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 23–44, see especially pp. 31–36; and Camillia Fawzi El-Solh and Judy Mabro, eds., *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), pp. 4–25.

15. Joseph, "Gender and Relationality," p. 468; Joseph, "Introduction," p. 12.

16. Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

17. Ibid., pp. 31–32.

18. Joseph, "Gender and Relationality," p. 468.

19. A good elaboration of this thesis can be found in Inhorn, *Infertility and Patriarchy*, pp. 2–10. Also also Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, pp. 31–32; and Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy," pp. 31–36.

20. Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy," pp. 31–36. Also see El-Solh and Mabro, *Muslim Women's Choices*, pp. 4–25.

21. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 217.

22. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 39–77, esp. p. 40.

23. See the analysis by Butler, *Gender Trouble,* p. 143ff.

24. Butler, "Contingent Foundations," p. 13.

25. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 129ff.

26. Mary Louise Adams, "There's No Place Like Home: On the Place of Identity in Feminist Politics," *Feminist Review* 31, no. 2 (1989): 22–33; Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation,* p. 9.

27. Butler, "Contingent Foundations," p. 15. Also see Chandra T. Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary* 12, no. 13 (1982): 344.

28. Jane Fishburne Collier and Sylvia Junko Yanagisako, eds., *Gender and Kinship: Essays Toward a Unified Analysis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 7.

29. Gocek and Balaghi, "Introduction," pp. 1–19, esp. p. 8. Suad Joseph's work in this area has been pioneering: see Joseph, "Gender and Relationality," pp. 465–486; Joseph, "Gender and Citizenship in Middle Eastern States," *Middle East Report* 26, no. 1 (January-March 1996): 4–10; Joseph, "Problematizing Gender and Relational Rights," pp. 271–285.

30. For two good theoretical perspectives on this issue, see Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986), pp. 1–25; and Valentine M. Moghadam, "Introduction," in Moghadam, ed., *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books, 1994), pp. 1–12. Also see Nahla Abdo, "Nationalism and Feminism: Palestinian Women in the Intifada—No Going Back?" in Moghadam, ed., *Gender and National Identity,* pp. 148–170.

31. Sondra Hale, *Gender Politics in Islam: Islamism, Socialism, and the State* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), p. 5, argues further that the phenomenon of Islamism or political Islam is "but one area of 'traditional' culture used to re-create identity politics through the maintenance of gender alignments." See my discussion of the Muslim Sisters in Chapter 7.

32. See for example, Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy*, pp. 38–40; and Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 12–27. The analysis of class and gender is well made by Valentine M. Moghadam, "The Political-Economy of Female Employment in the Arab Region," in Nabil R. Khoury and Valentine M. Moghadam, eds., *Gender and Development in the Arab World: Women's Economic Participation: Patterns and Policies* (London: Zed

Books, 1995), pp. 6–13. Also see National Commission for Poverty Alleviation (NCPA), *Palestine Poverty Report, 1998: Executive Summary* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestinian National Authority, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Institutional Building and Human Development Directorate, 1998), p. 9.

33. NCPA, *Palestine Poverty Report,* p. 9.

34. Ibid., p. 7.

35. Rather than referring to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), the official designation of Palestinian governance in the West Bank and Gaza, I have chosen to use simply Palestine Authority (PA), because I, together with many other analysts, believe that in signing the Oslo Accords, the Palestinian leadership sacrificed its "national" dimension.

36.The issue of the role of NGOs is particularly complex. As Rema Hammami has illustrated, NGOs have played an enormously important, albeit changing, role in Palestinian society. During the occupation they were the linchpins of the development of institutions of civil society. They were an important and a crucial response to occupation and statelessness. At the outset of the intifada, the original popular and mass nature of these organizations was reaffirmed. By 1991, however, many of them had transmogrified into professionally based, elite-led, foreign-funded, and, most significant to the needs of rural and camp women, "development-oriented" centers whose programs were geared to meet the demands of foreign funders rather than the actual needs of the Palestinian population. With the coming of the PA, many (especially, but not exclusively, those concerned with human rights and legal issues) have been confronted with relentless repressive measures, while others, mainly the most highly professionalized and heavily funded, have become "shops" (*duka'n)* wherein the local intellectual elite have established lucrative clan enterprises. Most important, the basic needs of village and camp women are ignored by the NGOs at the same time as their influence is growing in all sectors of Palestinian society. Rema Hammami, "Palestinian NGOs Since Oslo: From NGO Politics to Social Movements?" *Middle East Report* 30, no. 1 (spring 2000): 16–19, 27, 48. Also excellent on the deleterious nature of NGOs in the post-Oslo period is Roni Ben Efrat, "Porcupine Tangos: the PA and NGOs (Accompanied by the CIA Orchestra)," *Challenge* (Jaffa, bimonthly, English), September 1999, pp. 8–15.

37. Some examples include an increase in early school dropouts and early marriage due to fear of *iskat* (the practice of using deception to turn girls into informants*)*; restrictions on women's freedom of movement; arbitrary checkpoints that further impeded women's movement—even to obtain health care or deliver babies; the shooting, killing, arresting, and imprisoning of women; and the indiscriminate use of tear gas that caused numerous women to abort pregnancies and many more to suffer long-term respiratory problems.

38. Some of these include seven internal "security" services, a huge bureaucracy, censorship, arrest and detention without charge, torture, and others. See Amnesty International*, Palestinian Authority: Prolonged Political Detention, Torture, and Unfair Trials* (New York: Amnesty International, December 1996).

39. See the excellent analysis by Rita Giacaman, Islah Jad, and Penny Johnson, "For the Common Good? Gender and Social Citizenship in Palestine," *Middle East Report* 26, no. 1 (1996): 11–17. An excellent analysis of the deleterious effects of "clannish law" may be found in Ibrahim Khashan, "Women's Rights in the Clannish Custom in the Gaza Strip," paper presented at the Third International Conference: Health and Human Rights, Gaza Community Health Programme, October 13–15, 1997, Gaza City, Gaza, Palestine (manuscript provided by the author). For two excel-

lent articles on the nature of politics under PA authority, see Hillel Frisch, "Modern Absolutist or Neopatriachal State Building? Customary Law, Extended Families, and the Palestine Authority," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 29, no. 3 (August 1997): 341–358; and Rex Brynen, "The Neopatrimonial Dimension of Palestinian Politics," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 25, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 23–36.

40. Rosemary Sayigh, "Researching Gender in a Palestinian Camp: Political, Theoretical, and Methodological Problems," in Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Gendering the Middle East: Emerging Perspectives* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996), pp. 144–167.

41. PASSIA, *Ten Years* (East Jerusalem, West Bank, Palestine: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 1998), p. 210.

42. For a list of the studies on Palestinian women, see note 2, Introduction, this volume.

43. Hale provides an informative discussion of this problem in another context: Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan,* esp. pp. 3–28.

44. There, the director of the women's center insisted on being present during all the interviews, and it became apparent after three or four sessions that her presence was extremely inhibiting to the interviewees. Thus, this camp was abandoned, and the interviews from there were excluded from the final database.

45. Sayigh discusses at length both the positive and negative aspects of the "life stories" method: Sayigh, "Researching Gender in a Palestinian Camp," pp. 145–167.

46. Friedl, "Notes from the Village," p. 91.

47. Eventually, I concluded that "average" encompassed a range of economic variation but basically indicated that at least the family could feed and clothe their children. "Fair" or "poor" responses, usually made by women whose husbands were unemployed, suggested, at least to me, dire poverty. Such responses typically correlated with early school dropout, early marriage, poor health, etc. A reply of "good," I understood to mean that the necessities of life were available and stable, and that there was some additional money for educating the children through *tawjihi* (or further), an "independent" home, or some other highly valued "luxury." A few respondents who stated that their situation was "good" were clearly in very comfortable economic circumstances, but not more than a handful of women in my research community fell into this category.

48. On Palestinian society, see Safa Tamish, *Misconceptions About Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in Palestinian Society: Proceedings of Workshops in the West Bank and Gaza* (London: World University Services [in conjunction with The Tamer Institute for Community Education, Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine], 1996), pp. 5–14, wherein the author notes that village and camp women were far more receptive to discussions about sexual issues than were urban, educated, professional women. Also, Nadia Wassef, "Masculinities and Mutilations: Female Genital Mutilation in Egypt," *Middle East Women's Studies Review* 13, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 1–4, relates discussions with Egyptian women about sexual matters.

# 3

# Women As Individuals: The Structure, Shaping, and Maintenance of Women's Gendered Identities

*I've worked since I got married. I love working and I love my job. If I stay at home it's as if I've dropped out of life. Getting out of the house gives me opportunities for different ways of seeing the world. Working is very important for women. It builds character and gives a woman self-esteem. . . . If my husband told me to stop working I would accept his decision passively and stay at home. I might try to talk with him gently but I wouldn't carry it further than that because I wouldn't want it to reach the stage of divorce. The problem, you see, isn't just between my husband and me; the problem is the whole society. If I were to go to my parents and complain in such a situation, everyone—my father, my brothers, my uncles—would tell me that the issue* [of my working] *is my husband's responsibility. He is the man of the house. It's his right to make all decisions concerning me, I shouldn't even try to discuss his decision with him, and I should be contented at home. This is not the way I think it should be, but it doesn't matter what I think, it's much bigger than me. Here the norm of male dominance is extremely strong—no matter what class, educational level, social or geographic location, it's the same, and it's overwhelming.*

—Rasha, 28, married with three children, camp resident, "moderately religious" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

*A battered woman couldn't tell any of her friends or neighbors, much less her children, because of the community. We live with the community. I have a sister who was beaten black and blue every day by her husband. Once he pulled all her hair out and once he punched her eye out. Even I didn't know about any of this for many years—he's an educated man. But she was quiet and patient, and little by little, over the years, he began to appreciate her and to behave better with her. If a woman were to speak about violence outside, the man would react even more violently. And, instead of helping him as she should, she would be damaging him by tarnishing his and his family's*

*reputation. If the man or his family heard about her talk, she would be severely punished by both. Remember, most of the marriages here link families together. So if she hurts her husband and his family, she hurts herself and her family. This means that women must keep their mouths shut. Do I think this is right? It doesn't matter what I think. This is our society. I suffer. I sacrifice. But this is the life God gave me so I accept it.*

—Marwa, 45, married with three children, village resident, "very religious" Christian, *tawjihi*

*Our marriage is very difficult. My husband beats me nearly every day. He doesn't like me—he was forced to marry me as I was forced to marry him. I tried to talk to my family about my problems when we were first married but all that accomplished was creating more problems, especially with his family. So I decided not to tell anyone about my problems—just to keep them to myself . . . I don't even see my parents anymore . . . I don't know what God wants from me but to be honest, I don't care anymore. I don't care anything about my husband. All I care about is to have children and to take care of them.*

—Nada, 17, married, pregnant with twins, camp resident, "not very religious" Muslim, completed sixth grade

Marriage. Work. Violence. Silence. The voices of Rasha, Marwa, and Nada from three different decades, both Muslim and Christian, bring to life the dynamics of women in West Bank society and some of the dilemmas they face. This chapter examines the basic components of women's gender identities, specifically investigating what emerged in the interviews as the core ingredients of those identities: (1) kinship, with its twin pillars of functionally extended families and patriarchy and its discourse of "honor and shame"; (2) religion, with its belief in a masculine god and a feminine evil and its discourse on "complementarity"; (3) class, with its attendant justifications for exclusion, discrimination, and oppression; and (4) geographic locale, with its "self-evident" ascriptions of worth. In the course of that examination, the chapter also explores how gender identities are socially constructed, maintained, and bequeathed intact to the next generation.

## THE FOUNDATION OF GENDER IDENTITY: *GARABA*, RELATIONAL CONNECTIVITY, AND PATRIARCHY

In the West Bank (and the Arab world in general), identity signifies something quite different than it does in Western societies. Identity among camp and village women is firmly grounded in *garaba* (kinship) and in the connective web of relations that bonds kin groupings together.[1] In the West, we experience the individuating (separating) process; in Palestinian society, identity is experienced as "relational connectivity." Palestinians live and conceptualize their

lives not as individuals but as members of a family group. Kinship relations give rise to identity through relationality and connectivity within the family group. As Suad Joseph explains, "Relationality is a process by which socially oriented selves are produced under different regimes of political economy. . . . In the Arab world . . .various forms of relationality are highly valued and institutionally supported."[2]

Building on the concept of relationality, Joseph further expands our understanding of kinship dynamics by refining it in the concept of "connectivity." Connectivity involves relationships in which a person's personal boundaries are relatively fluid so that the individual understands her "self" to be constituted by "significant others"—overwhelmingly patrilineal agnates—that is, paternal relatives. Connectivity, Joseph argues, should be understood as an activity or intention (rather than a state of being) that acts to reinforce family solidarity.[3] Thus, in the first moment, kinship is deeply inscribed in identity; and relationality is intertwined with patriarchy so that connectivity is structured into a system of domination and subordination.[4]

Apprehending the connection between patriarchy and kinship is crucial to the comprehension of all the relations, roles, and hierarchies growing out of kinship in this particular social environment. Patriarchy, as noted in Chapter 1, involves "the privileging of males and seniors and the mobilization of kin structures, kin morality, and kin idioms to legitimate and institutionalize gendered and aged domination."[5] It gives rise to a group of ideological principles and social relations that privilege the primacy of paternal agnates in all social, economic, and political associations. These principles, in turn, define individual identity, roles (the gendered division of labor), social practices (such as marriage patterns and the preference for sons), and obligations; they also sanction personal connections.[6] Patriarchy is legitimized by the discourse of "honor and shame."[7]

The basic relations in a patriarchal system are control by, and submission to, those who rank higher in terms of age and gender: duties and obligations are strictly defined along these two axes.[8] They are marked by inequality but legitimized through the concept of "complementarity," which means that while roles and responsibilities are dissimilar and unequal, they are idealized as reciprocal and therefore of equal value. The institutionalization of hierarchies of age and gender signifies that older men have more power than do younger men, and men in general have more power than women.

Patriarchy originates in the family and is reflected and reinforced in every social institution. It gives rise to particular "truths" that distinctly position women and signify to them the "reality" of their situation. Several such truths, here expressed in common proverbs, include: "Women are too emotional, they think from their hearts; that is why men should make all the decisions in the house." "Woman's role in life is to be an obedient wife and good mother."

"Women's most important place is in the home—men have the right to go out and do whatever they wish." "Women should not humiliate their husbands by 'talking' outside the home." "Fathers have the right to decide about their daughters' education." "Husbands have the right to determine whether or not their wives may work outside the home." "If a wife disobeys her husband, he has the right to beat her."

Second only to functional hierarchies, "factionalism" is the preeminent dynamic of the *garaba s*tructure. It involves the fundamental separation of self from other, based on blood ties, and supersedes every other kind of social relation. Factionalism implies that individuals and families will behave differently with relatives than with outsiders (*gharibah*). Within families, ties are permanent and characterized by mutual support, caring, material assistance, individual sacrifice for the family good, and trust. Conversely, distrust, exclusion, competitiveness, suspicion, advantage seeking, a balance in obligations, an absence of concern, and frequent conflict typically mark relations among non-kin.[9]

The village women in my research community tended to regard with suspicion and distrust all *gharibah* women—especially those from within their particular village. This division was more blurred, yet clearly present, in the refugee camps. Non-kinswomen were treated formally and were usually contacted only when there was a very specific reason: weddings, wakes, and other formal occasions in which every village family was expected to participate. In terms of general deportment, my observations suggest that while kinswomen can and do laugh and joke together, dance in each other's company, and may even engage in ribaldry on occasion, in the presence of non-kin women, their behavior is proper and constrained. With regard to the inherent distrust, I often heard a woman exclaim to a sister regarding a visit by a non-kin woman: "What did she want?" "Why do you imagine she came by?" The sense of distrust felt by kinswomen toward non-kin women stems, in part, from the fear of the outsider gaining information about the family that could become gossip and then be used against the family. It is also related, at the most basic level, to the binary distinction between self and other—the factionalism inherent in this particular kinship configuration.

Kinship identity among Palestinian camp and village individuals is conceived of in terms of *hamayel* (clans), an ambiguous construction but roughly defined as a semiorganized collection of extended families (*'ailah*) based on patrilinality from one eponymous ancestor. *Hamayel* are usually, though not always, geographically contiguous. Historically, some Palestinian *hamayel* were large, spreading over several villages, while many were smaller, forming only part of the population of one village. After the *nakba* in 1948, many *hamayel* were widely dispersed—often to distant countries. However, regardless of size or contiguity, *hamayel* were, and in the main continue to be,

the fundamental structure in Palestinian sociopolitical organization and the basis of individuals' most significant social connections. Today, *hamayel* are most clearly observed within village society. In the camps, because the population is usually composed of refugees from more than one pre-1948 village, they are less distinct. Nevertheless, even in the camps, social organization, memory, marriage patterns, and other aspects of social life are organized around enduring clan structures as well as memories of village society that existed prior to 1948. This is apparent in women's everyday conversations about their former lives in their original village, in the hierarchy of their present social relations, and in various other ways.[10] Moreover, even when a *hamulah* is widely geographically dispersed, patrilineal affiliational and social ties remain in force.[11]

The *'ailah,* or functionally extended family, has specific characteristics and broad meaning for individuals in this society. Most significant is that kinship relations supersede every other kind of social relation. Kinship constitutes the dominant social institution through which persons or groups inherit their religious, class, and social affiliations, as well as providing security and support in the face of societal distress. Total loyalty and commitment to the family are the minimum expectations of every family member, while family interests almost always transcend those of individuals. In short, the traditional West Bank family constitutes both an economic and a social unit, and all members are expected to cooperate to ensure its continuation and advancement. It is the primary focus of loyalty, allegiance, and identity.[12] Traditionally, its strength and durability has derived from its ability to provide its members with all their basic needs—material, physical, and psychological. However, as a consequence of changing political and economic circumstances since the *nakba,* the Palestinian *'ailah* has become less and less able to meet the economic and security needs of its members, while at the same time and for the same reasons, many individuals have increasingly needed to rely on their clans.

In West Bank camp and village society, family solidarity has been necessary for social, economic, and political survival. The particular political and economic circumstances that have bounded the West Bank in the past century have reinforced connectivity and have made women's choices—even those that support this dynamic—both rational and functional. Nevertheless, patriarchal kinship, in the particular context of West Bank rural village and refugee camp society, is a system for monopolizing resources, maintaining kinship status, reproducing the patriline, controlling women's sexuality and bodies, legitimating violence, and appropriating women's labor. Two women's stories illustrate some of the ways patriarchal kinship affects women.

Mona grew up in a refugee camp in Jordan and was 18 and living in a refugee camp in the West Bank when I talked with her. Mona's father's fam-

ily was originally from Ramle. They became refugees in 1948; some family members migrated to West Bank camps while others, like Mona's father, went to Jordanian camps. Mona had completed her secondary education with a 98 percent average, passed the *tawjihi,* and had been accepted at the University of Jordan, where she intended to study medicine. During the summer before she was to start, the wife of one of her father's brothers came to Jordan from the West Bank for a visit. When she saw Mona, she decided Mona would be a perfect bride for her son. Over Mona's objections, the marriage contract was written—without the bride ever having seen her soon-to-be husband. Her aunt promised Mona's father that Mona could continue her education once she married and came to the West Bank. But the promises were not written into the marriage contract since the prospective husband was "family"—he and Mona are patrilateral parallel cousins—and it would have been socially shameful to question the family's word (honor) by requiring such a stipulation. The wedding party was set for two months hence; however, before the appointed time, Mona learned that her husband had been in prison for a violent criminal offense. She wanted to break the engagement but her father refused, insisting that she proceed with the marriage. He argued that since the marriage contract had been signed, if Mona backed out then, she would be considered a divorced woman with all the attendant negative connotations.

Mona had been married for ten months and was three months pregnant when we spoke. She described herself as an "observant" (Muslim) and in a "poor" economic situation. Since she married, she has not seen any of her family in Jordan. She could not even phone them, as there are few telephones in either camp and none in either family's home. Her mother-in-law forced her to leave the nursing school in the camp in which she had enrolled before coming to the West Bank. She did not allow Mona to leave her (the mother-in-law's house where she and her husband lived in one room) without either the mother-in-law or a sister-in-law in accompaniment. Additionally, Mona stated that she had been regularly beaten by her mother-in-law and forced to do all the housework. The physical distance and formalities involved in international travel made a temporary return to her natal home extremely difficult. Divorce was even more out of the question, especially since her husband did not want one. Should she go to court seeking a divorce, a Sharia judge would have inevitably refused her petition because her situation did not fall within any of the legal definitions that allow women to initiate divorce. Further deterrence came from her father's opposition since he did not want the shame that he would incur having agreed to give Mona to his brother's son. Mona cried throughout the interview but ended by saying: "I guess my situation isn't that unique. I simply have to learn to be patient and accept it."

Mona's story is a poignant illustration of the geographically wide-ranging consequences of patriarchal connectivity for women. It is a particularly

revealing example of the meaning of the functionally extended family. Felicia's situation is also highly relevant in this context. Though all her paternal relatives reside in one village, her story captures very concisely the dynamics of gender, identity, kinship, and patriarchal connectivity and the negative consequences this matrix of constructs can have on women. Felicia is a 27-year-old mother of three, a village resident who completed *tawjihi.* She is employed as a caregiver in a child daycare center and is an "observant" Muslim, in a "poor" economic situation.

> *I was 20 when I got married; I had just completed my first year of university and wanted to continue. My cousin* [father's brother's son] *was released after four years in prison from the intifada. I didn't know him but I accepted him as a husband—it was a traditional marriage. But I wanted to finish university before I married. My husband wanted to get married right away. He promised to let me finish my education, and my father didn't want to anger his older brother, so he insisted I do what my cousin wanted. I wanted to write in my marriage contract that I could continue my education but my father said no, that it was unnecessary because it was all in the family and it would appear that we didn't trust his word. After we got married—I got pregnant right away—he told me to leave the university. He said I could choose either to continue studying or to stay with him, but not both. He also said there was no reason for me to go on studying because he would never permit me to work. So I left the university. Then there were serious problems between my father and my husband's father* [they are brothers] *over the inheritance my grandfather left them, and their quarrel had a serious negative impact on my relationship with my husband. I also had many problems with my in-laws from the beginning of the marriage. My aunt* [mother-in-law] *used to beat me and shout bad words at me and humiliate me. Many times I went back to my family in despair. My first son was born in my parents' home. Once I stayed with my family for eight months and took a decision not to return to my husband. But the families interfered, especially my father who said I had to go back, because the family problems would get worse if I didn't. . . . Yes, my husband beat me frequently when we were first married, but now since I've come back the last time things are a little better. . . . I've been working for six years but only because our economic circumstances are so bad and because his mother said yes, and so he said okay. I don't mind the job; the pay isn't much, what I like most is getting out of the house and away from the family problems. My husband is seldom able to find work and we need my income, small as it is, just to feed the family. I do all the housework, child care, cooking, and cleaning. My husband refuses to do anything—he expects me to wait on him totally. My mother-in-law doesn't help me—I have to help her. My father and father-in-law are still quarreling and my mother-in-law still treats me badly, but I've learned to accept things more and to be more patient. All I really care about now are my children. All my hopes and dreams are with them. . . . I see the situation of women in this society as quite good, they have freedom, they get their education, they can work, they are in all the professions—even politics. I think the only problem Palestinian women face is their families.*

Neither Mona's or Felicia's story is unusual. Both reveal many of the issues that patriarchal kinship connectivity raises for women: selection of marriage partner, education, employment, in-laws, violence, and limitation of options.

Patriarchal patrilinality affects women in other specific ways. The necessity of producing paternal agnates in the context of patriarchal kinship mandates that women be fertile and bear "fruit," specifically sons. Within West Bank camp and village society, as in all Arab societies, there is a well-known preference for boys over girls that is explained by the importance of patrilinality combined with the son's obligations to his parents and sisters inherent in the relations of patriarchal kinship. The Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) statistically quantified this preference in 1995. Their findings demonstrated that among West Bank families with two or more daughters, 75 percent indicated that they wanted either no more daughters or at best only one more. By contrast, of families who had two or more sons, 85 percent preferred to have one or more additional sons in the future. Among families having three or more daughters, 70 percent said they preferred not to have any more daughters, as opposed to families with three or more sons, of whom only 20 percent indicated that they preferred not having any more sons.[13] This attitude is apparent, subjectively, in comments expressed by Jenna:

> *There is great discrimination between boys and girls, and between men and women in our society. When a woman gives birth to a boy, the father and everyone celebrates. But if she gives birth to a daughter, it's practically a shame—women comfort her and tell her "Inshallah, next time a boy." Yet it is women who give birth, nurture children, provide emotional support—how can they be devalued so much?*
>
> —Jenna, 32, single, village resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Women who either cannot or who are believed not to be able to have children are considered without value and dispensable. In particular, the inability to produce sons is an enormous liability for a woman. While Christianity prohibits divorce and polygamy, an infertile Muslim woman faces either divorce or the acceptance of a second wife. Even a woman who brings only female children can be either divorced or supplemented by another wife. The concern with reproductive capability is apparent even before a marriage proposal is considered, and a prospective groom and his family always evaluate a girl's health in the selection process. A girl who has had a health problem, however minor and treatable, will not be considered marriageable for fear she will be unable to bear children. A girl with the slightest disability—a minor limp for example—no matter how beautiful or otherwise desirable, is also unmarriageable. Once married, the new bride faces immediate and overwhelming

pressure to get pregnant**.** Even after having borne sons, women who become ill are at risk. A woman who contracts an illness after marriage is returned to her natal home for care and recuperation. A Muslim woman with a serious illness, even if she has male children, can be divorced and discarded. Three women's stories illustrate this.

> *When I was 20, I developed a problem with a disk in my spinal cord. The doctors were afraid I wouldn't be able to have children, so they advised my father not to marry me in order to prevent the possibility of divorce. Also they—the doctors and my father—were concerned that even if I brought children, I might not have the strength to care for them and a home. Again, the possibility of a divorce. This society simply doesn't accept sick women. I got treatment and eventually everything was fine, but by then I was 25 and too old to get married. I've never been sick since and now my problem seems to be that I can't stop getting pregnant. My husband refuses to use birth control and he prohibits me even though he has seven children from his first wife. But I manage—I manage my children, his children, the house, him, and this job which I wouldn't give up for the world.*
>
> —Aitab, 44, married (at 35 as a second wife) with four children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Samira's situation turned out much less positively than Aitab's. A 29–year-old village resident, she completed eight years of school, was married at 24, and has one son. In the second year of her marriage, while she was pregnant, Samira was diagnosed with a degenerative bone disease. The delivery was uncomplicated and she was healthy the following year, caring for her son, home, and husband. During the fourth year of the marriage her condition worsened, though she was still quite functional. Nevertheless, at his mother's urging, her husband took their son and left. Subsequently he divorced her and took another wife. Now the husband, his new wife, and Samira's son live together two houses away from Samira's. She has not been permitted to see her son since her husband left her. This year she has been confined to a wheelchair in the care of her elderly mother. The women in the village say they "feel" with Samira but "What can we do?" The men in the village support the husband, saying: "He's young and he has to get on with his life. He doesn't need such a burden. Besides, he needs someone to take care of his needs."

Finally, from a Christian woman:

> *After I finished* tawjihi *I was very sick. I stayed at home for four years but this is top secret because when a young woman is sick here, her value as a marriage partner goes down very far. No one wants to take a chance on a woman who is or has been sick, or who is thought to be frail, because they think maybe she won't be able to produce children. I recovered fully from my disease—it was a surprise even to my doctors. I finished my diploma and I've*

*been teaching ever since. But as you see, to this day I am not married. I'd like to marry and I hope there is still a chance but at 33 it doesn't seem likely.*
—Hind, 33, single, village resident, "very religious" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Concern with maintaining and reproducing agnate solidarity and patrilineage has meant that the preferred marriage pattern historically has been between patrilateral parallel cousins. Some writers argue that in Palestine, the actual occurrence of first-cousin marriage is considerably lower today than it was in the past.[14] Still others argue that it was not as pervasive in earlier generations as has been claimed.[15] However, the most recently published demographic research on marriage patterns in the West Bank demonstrates just the opposite. The data were generated through an extensive survey conducted in 1995 by the PCBS. It quantifies the percentage of patrilateral first cousin (*'ailah*) marriages in five-year age increments (ages 15 to 54) and illustrates that the practice has remained essentially constant over the past forty years at 27.5 percent of all marriages. Paternal first-cousin marriages are most prevalent in the villages (32.6 percent) and somewhat less frequent in the camps (24.4 percent). If marriage beyond the *'ailah* is extended to include marriage within the same *hamulah,* the percentage of intraclan marriages stands at 58.0 percent in Palestinian villages and 43.5 percent in the camps.[16] Patrilateral parallel cousin marriage is the preferred pattern in both the Christian and Muslim communities; however, among Christians, it is important for reasons other than reproducing patrilinality. Since divorce is prohibited in this community, Christians believe that first-cousin marriages provide women with security—that is, a first cousin will be less likely to mistreat or abandon a wife. In any case, whatever the actual marriage pattern in either community, the ideal of patrilateral parallel cousin marriage remains strong.

Siham provides an additional example of patriarchal connectivity and of how the preferred marriage pattern in paternal kinship affects women. She was engaged at 13, during grade six, to her father's brother's son. Although engaged, Siham, atypically, remained in school until the beginning of her twelfth-grade year, when her uncle insisted that his son and Siham marry immediately.

*I didn't want to get married at 18. I didn't want to interrupt my education. I loved school and I was a very good student—my average was in the 90s. I always dreamed, till now I dream, of going to university. I loved math; I was on the science track but I had to change to the arts track after I got married because it was too difficult to study for the science exam alone at home.*

Siham became pregnant two months after she married; however, she continued to study at home for the *tawjihi.* She was sick throughout her pregnancy,

studied poorly, and failed the exam. She studied again the following year, alone with a young baby and pregnant with her second son, and passed. However, her husband prohibited her from attending university.

> *My father had a kind heart and even though he only had four years of education himself, he believed it was very important for me to complete my education. He strongly supported my going to university—he was very proud of me. But because his brother wanted me for his son, he couldn't say no. I guess that's my fate.*
>
> —Siham, 20, married with two children,
> village resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Nihel provides an example of how the functionally extended family affects women in other ways:

> *I would like to work when I finish school. My parents would probably agree, but my uncles would be very upset and would definitely prevent it. The uncles would talk to my dad and convince him that girls shouldn't work. They should stay at home until they are married. My uncles are so scared about the reputation of all the girls in the family and how people will talk about us. They force all the women in the family to stay at home.*
>
> —Nihel, 18, camp resident, single, "average" Muslim,
> in twelfth grade but "doesn't expect to pass the *tawjihi*"

## LEGITIMIZING PATRIARCHAL KINSHIP: THE HONOR CODE AND THE CULTURE OF SHAME

Patriarchal kinship in West Bank camps and villages has been traditionally sustained through a discourse of moral worth that is grounded both in a relationship to land and in a strictly upheld, scrupulously adhered to code of honor *(sharaf).* Land ownership confers honor (*ard*) in Palestinian rural society and has been an important component of the honor system. Today, however, because of Israel's dispossession of Palestinians from their land and continuing land confiscation, plus a trend among many Palestinian men to seek work as paid laborers (or professionals) rather than tilling the land, the moral worth of owning and cultivating land has declined.[17] The honor code specifies values and behaviors for both men and women. For men, these include autonomy, independence, assertiveness, hospitality, generosity, and family financial maintenance. A crucial dimension of male honor is *shoja'a,* which involves the ability to resist domination through equal or greater strength. In addition, the honor code values as "real men" those who control their dependents; thus, male sovereignty over women, by whatever means, is culturally sanctioned.[18] Partly for this reason, domestic violence is widespread throughout Palestinian society, though difficult to quantify. As an indicator, approximately 50 percent

of the married women I interviewed admitted to having been beaten by their husbands. (The issue of violence is elaborated in Chapter 5.) Notably, however, the honor code affords men considerable leeway, both in personal and sexual freedom. Men are free to go any place at any time and work wherever they choose. Sexually, they are not required to be chaste at marriage, and they may have female friends before marriage.

However, changing political and economic circumstances—such as dispossession, occupation, and impoverishment—have diminished the ability of men to fulfill the specific components of the traditional male honor code. Given the poverty and powerlessness of individuals in West Bank camps and villages, most men are no longer materially able to prove their honor through demonstration of their autonomy, independence, hospitality, adequate family maintenance, and generosity. Nor, of course, under conditions of occupation (and more recently, PA repression) can they exercise assertiveness or *shoja'a.* Consequently, since the relationship between land and moral worth is ambiguous and the ability of males to fulfill traditional honor requisites has diminished, women's role in maintaining family honor has acquired greater significance. Indeed, men's ability to be independent and to demonstrate assertiveness is virtually limited to exacting these qualities from their women. Female honor, in turn, has become the primary, sometimes the only, vehicle through which men can affirm their honor or moral worth.[19]

For women, the honor code is encapsulated in a modesty decalogue that entails absolute sexual purity (chastity upon marriage and complete faithfulness thereafter), obedience, self-restraint and self-effacement, decorousness in dress and speech, and seclusion.[20] The essence of the modesty code for women, however, resides in sexual purity, which involves denial of sexual desire and avoidance of anything or any person that may carry a sexual connotation—in practice, virtually every thing and every male.[21] Girls are taught that their honor depends upon their not talking to, not looking at, and not being seen by men. Adherence to this norm positions women and regulates all aspects of their behavior. It defines what type of employment they can engage in; where they can go; how they should dress; what they can do; and with whom they can do it. A woman working in a mixed (male-female) environment, traveling alone, playing sports in public, walking in the street with a male, riding in a mixed *serveece* (taxi) risks being labeled "shameful." Ghada relates:

> *When I was in school, I used to sometimes talk to a boy on the way home, but gossip put an end to that very quickly. People used to come to my father and say: "I saw your daughter talking to so and so. Is she going to marry him? If not, her behavior is shameful." My father would ask me: "What's the story? Does he want to marry you?" I'd say: "No, we're just friends, we were just talking for a few minutes." The first time it happened,*

*he wasn't too upset. But after the second or third, he forbade me from talking to boys under any circumstances, so I stopped. My mother watched me very carefully.*

—Ghada, 21, single, village resident, "nonobservant" Christian, finished twelfth grade but failed *tawjihi*

In Palestinian society, honor is not an attribute of an individual, although every individual is expected to behave honorably according to the gendered values of the honor code. Rather, honor is an evaluative designation given to a *hamulah* or an '*ailah* by society (*mujtama'*). Yet, an individual's adherence to the moral code brings honor—or shame—to the entire clan or the extended family, while the relative moral worth of the clan, as judged by society, is inscribed on every individual in the clan. Thus, every family member is responsible for the acts of every other. If one family member brings shame upon herself, the whole clan is brought down in shame.

In sum, honor is the very basis of gender identity. Moreover, it is at the root of gender oppression: Women attain honor primarily through passive conformity, and dishonor falls almost exclusively on women. Ideologically, honor serves to justify men's absolute control over women. The discourse of honor functions to reinforce and reproduce the hierarchical structure of the family, while the dialectic between the individual and society functions quasi-automatically to enforce the honor code and maintain the institutions of the social order.[22] Society has a variety of means with which to render its judgment—from gossip (*namima*) to honor killing.

Gossip is the primary process by which society enforces the honor code on the individual. What women fear most is being talked about. Visiting and gossiping are a mainstay of social interaction. Since in these communities everyone knows everyone else, and a girl's marriage prospects are entirely dependent upon her reputation, the mere hint of dishonor can ruin a girl's life. A girl or woman walking alone in the street, especially if she is not clearly on a purposeful mission, is immediately the subject of gossip. Where is she going? Who is she meeting? Rumors about her, typically magnified, quickly spread around the village or camp until someone tells her father or brothers, after which punishment is swift. Not wanting to be the object of such rumors and gossip, girls and women censor themselves to an extreme extent. "Modest" women do not leave their homes unless they have an extremely good reason to do so that has been approved by a dominant male and is very apparent to the community at large. Still, it is better if they go in the company of another, responsible, woman. The necessity for clarity of purpose and prior approval negates the possibility for girls or women ever to engage in spontaneous behavior outside the confines of their socially designated space. Deena illustrates.

*The situation is quite critical for women who go out. People talk about them, and my brother doesn't like people talking about me. So he forbids me from leaving the house. My fiancé encourages me to get some skills but my brother refuses. My family is very protective of the girls. My brother actually has more control over us than my father does.*

—Deena, 18, engaged since 13, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Um Hatem provides another example.

*I don't permit my unmarried daughters* [ages 24, 18, 16] *to go out at all—to visit or for any other reason. Even myself, I don't like to go out, and I don't go out unless it's for a very special occasion. My daughters accept this; they don't even ask for permission to go out because they know they should be in the house all the time. . . . I am very afraid of the criticism of society—gossip and rumors. I don't like gossip. It can ruin a woman.*

—Um Hatem, 45, married with thirteen children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

Social ostracism or boycott of a family is another means by which society controls individuals' behavior. This type of retribution can make it impossible for a family to function within the society—economically, socially, or in any other way. Out of fear of society's disapprobation and punishment, women themselves "spontaneously" limit their own life possibilities. Tamra, a Christian, illustrates.

*Personally, marrying a Muslim would be no problem for me as long as he wasn't religious. But I would never, under any circumstances do it, because it would mean a complete break with my family. They would never accept it. It's not just my family's personal attitudes, it's society's views. If I married a Muslim and my father accepted it, my whole family would be ostracized by society. I wouldn't do that to my father and my family. But my father couldn't accept it, even if he did in his heart, because to do so would bring shame not only to our family, but to the whole clan. Here, you see, society's norms determine family behavior and attitudes. Intermarriage is socially unacceptable. So even if I found the perfect man, and even as much as I would like to marry and have a family—which is becoming increasingly less likely considering that I'm 30—if he was a Muslim, I wouldn't marry him. I would prefer to spend my life alone than to disgrace my family and lose their affection and support.*

—Tamra, 30, single, village resident, "average" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Finally, the practice of honor killing is the supreme punishment for perceived or real female violation of the honor code. Honor killing is a manifestation of tradition or customary law *('urf)*. As practiced in the West Bank, it is

a very serious manipulation of Islamic Sharia, wherein four male witnesses to the actual act of adultery are required before a woman can be legally punished, and both participants are to receive equal retribution. Yet, Sharia notwithstanding, honor killings are gender specific. Men who engage in adulterous behavior are never killed. Today, honor killings occur mainly in the Muslim community, but as Mary Eliza Rogers relates from her observations in Palestine during the 1850s, historically they also occurred among Christians. After spending time with the Christian community in Nazareth, she commented that the city was not noted for its morality; "the fathers and husbands are said to be severe and rigid disciplinarians, and dishonor is punished with certain death."[23]

During the first year that I lived in the West Bank, there were approximately twenty-three such killings, including the murder of a cousin of my first translator.[24] In the second year, there were approximately twenty-five. That the actual number of honor killings is relatively low is less important than the fact that they are socially legitimated and serve as a powerful constraint on women's behavior and choices. Unlike instances of domestic violence, which are far more widespread but are typically kept secret, honor killings are usually made public and even reported in the local press.[25] This is because the family that carries out such a killing is proud of their decisive behavior in eradicating the shame a female member has brought to the family and anxious to assert the restoration of its honor. Moreover, society extols men who are "man-enough" to maintain their family's honor. The approbation that society accords such men is reflected in the fact that perpetrators of honor killings receive little if any punishment—perhaps a maximum of six months in prison. Strikingly, many women believe honor killings are justified. Such beliefs suggest how thoroughly some women have internalized patriarchal ideology. A typical response in this regard was:

> *If a woman did it, she deserves worse than killing. And there should be no punishment for a man who kills to wipe out a woman's shame and restore his family's honor.*
>
> —Um Hussein, 47, married with thirteen children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

A second, much younger, professionally employed woman had a unique perspective in that she had witnessed such a killing.

> *If women take care of their honor—this is the most important thing a woman must do in life—there won't be honor killings. When I was 16 my neighbor got married. I remember the wedding. She looked very beautiful. But she had a baby six months later. Her brother came to the house—they lived just next door to us—and stabbed her and stabbed her. There was blood all over. But*

*I felt proud of this man, her brother. He had a strong character and he did what he should have done.*

—Selwa, 33, married with three children, camp resident, "85 percent observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Other women have ambiguous attitudes toward the practice.

*I think as my society thinks. If a woman is bad she should be killed. But according to the Quran she should only be beaten, not killed. But the people here in the village don't feel satisfied unless she's killed. They feel that it's necessary to maintain their and their family's honor. Also, according to the Quran, there should be four witnesses. And then even if she's guilty she should be beaten, not killed. So they must be very sure when they kill her. Personally, I don't like the killings.*

—Um Omar, 43, married with eight children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed seventh grade

Still others are completely against honor killing.

*I am totally against honor killings. If they kill a woman they must make 100 percent sure that she is guilty, and to have four witnesses is very difficult. Even if they bring four, they might be lying, and she might be innocent. I believe in Sharia and I'm a very devout Muslim but I think honor killings are against Sharia.*

—Um Ahmad, 32, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eleventh grade

*Honor killing is a crime. We don't need a civil law to regulate this—it is very clear in Sharia. In the Quran it states that unless a woman admits it, there must be four witnesses to the actual illicit behavior. It's virtually impossible to imagine four witnesses in such a situation. So you can never be absolutely sure of a women's guilt. Besides, even if a woman is guilty, I don't believe in killing her. The Quran says she should be beaten or stoned. But it also mandates the same punishment for the man involved, and I can assure you that never happens. So if men are not punished, why should women be? I don't agree at all with honor killing.*

—Rita, 27, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

Perhaps even more striking is the fact that in West Bank camp and village society, a girl who is raped is considered responsible for having been raped and is viewed as bringing dishonor on her family. Palestinian journalist Rula Sharkawi commented:

Many girls are raped each year and the dilemma continues to remain hidden. In some cases, even the raped girl's male family members are not told

> for fear that one of her brothers or father will kill her as the only way to "cleanse" the family honor. . . . Women who have been raped are often seen as participants in immoral acts, even though, as the word "rape" suggests, the girl or woman was forced against her will and without her consent.[26]

Overall, the honor code has enormous implications for women's lives. First, women must exercise absolute self-control. Silence is one of the strongest internal mechanisms of individual control and, in turn, of social control in West Bank camp and village society. The ideology of patriarchal kinship relations requires that women never speak badly of their husbands or discuss family problems beyond the confines of the family.[27] '*Agl* (social sense/wisdom), an important norm in the honor code, requires that one never speak outside the family about family matters—which are, of course, everything meaningful in the lives of these women. This ironclad rule affects women in highly negative ways. Marwa's comments at the chapter's outset provide one example. Another comes from a young village woman who talked to me at length about several painful personal experiences related to engagement and marriage; she said it was the first time she had ever spoken of these things to anyone.

> *I had friends when I was in school—but I never visited them and I don't see them now. I don't like having friendships with other people. Here people are all the time gossiping and talking about everyone and everything they do. . . . When I really need to talk about something, I go to my room and talk to myself. No, it isn't easy. But I can't talk to anyone else—I would always be worried that they might tell someone else. So I keep to myself. It's difficult but at least I feel comfortable.*
>
> —Nardine, 21, single, village resident, "not religious" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

And, from a third woman:

> *Women are afraid to talk about their problems. They are afraid of society and gossip and of their families and their honor. Women don't want to talk to other women about their problems with their husbands because they are afraid the woman they confided in will then talk badly about them and their family. They are afraid of gossip and of not being seen by society as "good" women. So women keep quiet about their problems—even women who gossip a lot about other women don't talk about themselves. Take my sister. She married at 18 and has six children. Her husband treats her miserably. I know because I've seen him humiliate her. And I know she's very unhappy—I'm her sister—we grew up together! But she has never said one word to me or to anyone else of her situation.*
>
> —Asya, 35, single, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus M.A. in accounting

Additionally, families must impose their own absolute control to ensure that their daughters conform to the dictates of society. Thus, girls are never left unsupervised, and married women cannot leave their homes without the permission of their husbands. Such seclusion isolates women both spatially and psychologically.

The interrelationship among the discourse of honor and shame, the social practice of gossip, and the internal censuring mechanism of silence affects women in every aspect of their lives. Countless women from all locales told me the major problem women face in this society is the "culture of shame" in which they are bound. Everything is *haram, eib,* or *mamnou'*—religiously prohibited, socially shameful, or forbidden. Concerns about female honor prevent many girls from doing a variety of things—including finishing school, riding a bicycle or playing sports, riding in a *serveece* (a "mixed" taxi), visiting friends or participating in social activities (nonexistent in the villages anyway), learning to drive or driving a car, and working. It silences them, imposes physical/psychological isolation, encourages early marriage, and creates a myriad of other problems. The fear of dishonoring oneself and, in turn, one's entire family and *hamulah* acts as a powerful internal constraint on behavior and a pivotal means of reinforcing and reproducing the patriarchal kinship system. Society, in turn, reinforces this fear.[28] The following stories illustrate.

> *Women have to endure so many pressures from their families and husbands. . . . If a man says "Good morning," people immediately assume we are having affair. Otherwise, why would he, or I, be saying "Good morning."*
>
> —Rawiya, 27, married with three children, camp resident, "not religious" Muslim, completed tenth grade

> *The traditional norms themselves are the biggest problem women have to face. For example, if a woman wants to study to be a nurse, the first thing the men will say is "What—a nurse! Working in a mixed environment! Never!" Okay, we put nursing aside. Then, "I want to be a teacher." The men will say, "Oh you want to spend all your time outside your house. How will you take care of your children? When will you cook for your husband—you won't be able to have his food ready when he comes home. No!" Okay, we put teaching aside. . . . Women cannot even talk with other women about their personal problems because if she talks outside the family, that will create a big problem within the family—the whole extended family.*
>
> —Iqbal, 32, married with five children, camp resident, "Muslim Sister," completed tenth grade

Tagrid is very clear about the relationship between society and the individual.

> *I don't have any freedom of movement. For example, if I want to go and do something in Ramallah, it's not so much my family, it's the society around my*

*family who will come and convince my father not to allow me out. And since my father is part of this society, he can't do things, or allow me to do things, that are against society's norms.*

—Tagrid, 20, single, camp resident, "not observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

*The culture of shame prevents women from working—everything for us is shameful. . . . Women in general are conscious about their rights. For example, if a woman is beaten, she knows her husband doesn't have that right but it's beyond the consciousness of women—it's the culture. It is shameful to talk badly about your husband. . . . Even if a beaten woman's friends happen to stop by and find her crying or black and blue, she will say, "My children are giving me a hard time" or "I injured myself." It's shameful for a woman to leave her house and go to some public place with her problems. We've grown up in a culture where we are taught, and we understand, that men are the heads of the house. If we were to walk out of the house in the middle of a beating we would be finished, we'd lose everything. The man would just divorce us.*

—Rina, 34, married with one child, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

While the above women are cognizant of the problem, other women evidence a remarkable acceptance and internalization of the system and its ideology—society, fate, or God's will. Three comments illustrate.

*My husband is quite restrictive but I accept that. For example, sometimes I want to go to visit my sister, but he almost always says no. Sometimes I try to talk to him a little but then I think, he's my husband, he has the right to make the decisions, he has the right to do whatever he wants to do. I cry sometimes, then I think about it again and I realize that he is right. I shouldn't go to see my sister. . . . He doesn't allow me to come to this* [women's] *center; I just happened to be passing by when they asked me if I would like to talk with you. He expects me to be at home at all times. It's okay with me. It's as it should be. And if sometimes I feel unhappy, I have only to think a while and not be emotional, and I know our relationship is good and this is how it should be. It's true you know, women are too emotional.*

—Leila, 32, married with no children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

*Yes, this is a patriarchal society, but I don't see any problem with that. Men have to control women and they have the right to direct you in certain directions that they think are best. No matter how old you become, your father is your father, and your husband is your husband—that never changes, nor should it.*

—Ibtisam, 34, single, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Ferdoz provides an example in a much younger woman.

> *I try to keep my behavior very straight so society has no reason to interfere. If I feel I'm doing something wrong, I straighten myself before anyone has to straighten me. But society has the right to criticize people's behavior and I wouldn't mind society's criticism if I did something wrong. But I make 100 percent sure not to do anything wrong. . . . Yes, there are women in this village who have had their behavior straightened by society. I think it's a good way.*
>
> —Ferdoz, 18, single, village resident, "observant" Muslim, in twelfth grade preparing for *tawjihi*

Despite the foregoing, it is important not to overlook the fact that there are positive aspects to kinship connectivity, and it is highly valued by many women. A story involving my second translator, Dana, illustrates one way that connectivity is beneficial. As our work was coming to its conclusion, Dana needed to find a full-time job. There was a good position open at one of the women's centers for which she applied. Her sister Rana was likewise in the situation of needing a job at the time, and she too applied for the position. Both women were equally, if not identically, qualified for the opening. Dana was offered the position but turned it down in favor of her sister. When I inquired about her decision, she related:

> *We never think in terms of what is best for our individual selves—we think in terms of what is best for our family. When I was called in* [to the women's center] *and told that I had been chosen for the position, I was extremely pleased. But I thought to myself that my sister needs this job more than I do even though our economic circumstances are the same. I asked the director who was second in line for the job and when she said it was Rana, I decided to decline their offer so that Rana could have the job. If someone else had been second in line, I wouldn't have declined. But since they told me my sister would get it, I thought that was best. She doesn't know I did this—she would be very upset if she knew. But I'm certain that if she had been in my place she would have done the same thing.*
>
> —Dana, 33, single, village resident, "average" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

## RELIGIOUS UNDERPINNINGS OF GENDER IDENTITY: THE EVIL TEMPTRESS

Both Christianity (Roman Catholicism and Greek Orthodoxy) and Islam constitute, for their adherents, an additional web of roles, relationships, obligations, and restrictions that are deeply inscribed in individual identities, including specific attributions of moral worth. On the one hand, these religious affiliations transcend *hamulah* divisions, though they create another set of

divisions themselves. They also provide legitimating ideologies that buttress patriarchal kinship and contribute to the oppression of women.

Palestine was the birthplace of Christianity and is a direct outgrowth of Judaism, which Gerda Lerner argues gave rise to pristine or "classic" patriarchy.[29] Initially, the egalitarian Christian ideas concerning the intrinsic value of the individual, the equal spiritual worth of men and women, and the superiority of celibacy to carnal pleasures provided some space for a few women to avoid marriage and male domination and to gain a measure of control over their lives. However, for the majority of women, the mores determining the lives of Byzantine Christian females were thoroughly oppressive and restrictive. Leila Ahmed's extensive historical research found that the birth of a boy was greeted with joy, though not that of a girl. Girls could be betrothed in infancy and were usually married by age 12 or 13. Proper female conduct entailed silence and total seclusion. And "honorable" women had always to be veiled (prostitutes were not allowed to veil).[30] In turn, the writings of prominent Christian theologians (such as Augustine, Origen, and Tertullian) reified such misogynistic practices. For example, Augustine, who believed that women did not have souls, pondered the question of why God had created women at all and concluded: "I fail to see what use woman can be to man . . . if one excludes the function of bearing children." Women, in Augustine's perspective, were simply a source of sexual temptation.[31] Even more relentless in his misogyny, Tertullian wrote of women:

> You are the Devil's gateway. You are the unsealer of the forbidden tree. You are the first deserter of the divine law. You are she who persuaded him whom the Devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert . . . even the Son of God had to die.[32]

Completing the discursive basis for the oppression of women in the Judeo-Christian Western tradition, it is instructive to consider Aristotle's teachings on women. According to Aristotle, the purpose of marriage and the function of women were to provide heirs. He conceptualized women as not merely subordinate by social necessity but also as innately and biologically inferior in both mental and physical capacities—and thus as intended for their subservient position by "nature." Aristotle likened the rule of men over women to the rule of the "soul over the body," and of the mind and the "rational element over the passionate." The male, he said, "is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules and the other is ruled."[33] Aristotle saw female bodies as defective, woman being "as it were an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female." Thus, Aristotle even considered the female contribution to conception inferior: The male contributed the

soul and gave form to the secretion of the female, which merely provided the material mass.[34]

As the Christian church developed, under the influence of the theologians, Christian dogma became far removed from the teachings and practices of Jesus and, in turn, obsessively misogynistic and preoccupied by women's sinful sexuality. Christian women came to symbolize the loathsome temptress Eve (the Whore), responsible for man's fall from Grace, or the Madonna, the sexually chaste virgin mother of God—two sides of the same mutilated concept. Women's life choices, resulting from their fatal concupiscence, were thus limited to absolute seclusion in a nunnery or nearly total seclusion within their houses in their only socially acceptable role as childbearers. The supreme head of the Eastern Orthodox Christian church is the "patriarch," and although after the Eastern and Western churches split in 1054, he no longer embodied the infallibility of the pope of Rome, the edicts of the patriarch were, and are today, as are the pope's, obeyed without question.[35] Misogyny and patriarchy were thus institutionalized and religiously and philosophically legitimated in Middle Eastern culture long before the advent of Islam.

Islam emerged in the seventh century C.E., and was influenced by these existing practices and discourses. It explicitly identified itself with Judaism and Christianity and incorporated veneration of all the Judeo-Christian prophets, including Jesus (as a prophet not as the Son of God), as well as many biblical stories—from Noah and the flood through Mary's immaculate conception. For Muslims, Islam constitutes the supreme legitimating symbolic universe integrating all institutional realms. Islam is a religion, a way of life, and a system of law and jurisprudence. It proclaims itself as a universal ideology for all people, in all places, and at all times. Islam conceptualizes existence as an ineffable unity: God the creator and his universe, man, and society all bound together in an intricate interrelationship of reciprocal rights, responsibilities, and obligations. The Quran, believed by Muslims to be the divine Word of God (as is the Torah for Jews), is both a physical and a metaphysical symbol—a sign—that is daily read, listened to, recited, and revered.

Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, began revealing the received Word of God to his followers in Mecca in 610 C.E. The religion spread with extraordinary rapidity because, to a considerable extent, it encompassed, reflected, refined, codified, and reified the existing cultural, social, and religious practices of the Arabian people—including kinship and patriarchy. The word *Islam* means submission—to God and to his laws. A Muslim, by definition, must submit her or his will to the will of God. Islam is believed to have improved the status of women compared to pre-Islamic Arabia—which in some areas it undoubtedly did—prohibiting female infanticide, restricting polygamy, giving women a portion of inheritance, and more.[36] At the same time, however, despite Islam's ideological emphasis on "universality," it rein-

forced and reproduced patriarchal kinship—with Allah (God) as the ultimate patriarch. Hisham Sharabi writes:

> The greatness of Muhammad's political achievement rests in his success . . . in integrat[ing] existing social and psychological bonds into the structure of the new Islamic community. The Islamic ummah [community] turned out to be nothing more than a super-tribe, the projection of the universal tribal ethos. God, in the image in which Muhammad portrays Him, is a psychologically familiar figure. Submission, the basic relation of pristine patriarchy, is here given its most powerful ideological expression. Under Muhammad, submission, Islam, for that is what it means, is to the tribalized ummah symbolized by God.[37]

As with the original teachings of Jesus, God's early revelations to the prophet Muhammad included the equal spiritual and ethical worth of man and woman, required equal justice for men and women, and were addressed directly to women as well as to men. By the tenth century C.E., however, Muslim theologians took it upon themselves to interpret the Quran and the prophet Muhammad's teachings. Under the guidance of four prominent male jurists, four schools of Sunni orthodoxy emerged codifying an absolutist, androcentric, misogynous corpus of law. This law, the Sharia, has since been regarded as the core, immutable, prescriptive/proscriptive text of Islam. (Two schools dominate in Shi'ism.) In the orthodox texts, women's position was debased, degraded, and objectified. It is this reading of Islam that has prevailed since the tenth century, obliterating the spiritual and ethical egalitarianism of Muhammad's message.[38]

Religious discourse—both Christian and Islamic—greatly contributed to the devaluation of women through the promotion of the ideology of "complementarity," the belief that while gender roles and obligations are different, they are reciprocal and therefore of equal value. Islamic discourse contains extensive commentaries on the specificity of male and female roles in society, and although Christianity never refined the issue of complementarity with the precision and legal injunctions, prescriptions, and proscriptions that Islamic jurisprudence accomplished, the two religions differ little. The essence of the concept of complementarity resides in the belief that the purpose of women is procreation and reproduction of the social order within a marital union; therefore women belong at home, in the private, domestic realm, engaged in duties fulfilling this role. Men's function is to provide for his wife and children; thus his duties fall in the public realm wherein he works, socializes, and governs. The marital relationship is thus essentially reduced to one of authority and obedience.

Christianity, as expressed in the classic works cited above, asserts women's biological inferiority as the basis of gender inequality. Traditionally,

however, Islamic ideas about gender roles were not predicated on the belief in female inferiority.[39] The eleventh-century Muslim scholar Imam al-Ghazli, whose tome *The Revivification of Religious Sciences* has had a profound impact on the thinking of Muslim scholars for centuries, affirms the potential equality between the sexes.[40] But in al-Ghazli's thinking, woman's potential power—her "active" sexuality and her supposedly all-absorbing, destructive power over men (*qaid*)—is so enormous that, left unchecked, it presents a threat to the entire social order by distracting men from their social and religious duties and causing chaos (*fitna).* Thus, as Fatima Mernissi argues, women's actual inequality in Islamic societies is the outgrowth of specific social institutions designed to restrain the potential power of the female.[41]

Other Islamic scholars argue, however, that men and women differ psychologically in that "women are more emotional, while in man, the intellect dominates over the emotions." Since the male is "rational" and the provider of economic maintenance for the family, this in turn gives him leadership and ultimate decisionmaking power. "In the best interests of the family, its leadership is assigned to the husband merely on the basis of his qualifications for this office [head of household]. His natural qualifications of firmness and reason combined with his experience of the external affairs of society make him a better candidate than his wife. . . . Man is governor, director, protector, guardian and manager of the affairs of women."[42] One of my respondents reflected these ideas quite directly.

> *Many women are asking for their rights today, but that is not the issue. Islam gives women all their rights. Islam teaches that men and women are equal in the eyes of God. But practically, because men are more intelligent, more rational, and have more responsibilities, and women are more emotional and cannot do the same kinds of things that men do, men have a few more rights. That is only logical.*
>
> —Maisa, 26, married with two children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

For the same reason, rulers, judges, scholars, and the like must be men, because if women were to hold such positions "emotions [would] permeate government and judgement, [and] the rights of many will be violated . . . government and legal judgement should lie where reason dominates feelings."[43] Such arguments have been very effective (particularly in more recent times) in excluding women from participation in public life.

In practice, however, it does not seem to matter whether the starting point is female inferiority or the potential of female power. West Bank village and camp women are equally oppressed whether they are Christian or Muslim. Gender oppression is observed in all social institutions in which male dominance is fostered through sexual segregation, role differentiation, the dis-

courses of complementarity and honor and shame, and the multiple ways in which religion intersects with patriarchal ideology and practice to reinforce gender identities, gender inequalities, and female subordination.[44]

Both Christianity (Middle Eastern) and Islam place enormous stress on the afterlife—paradise—where all faithful believers will be compensated for their earthly suffering. The strength of this conviction may explain respondents' acceptance of their situations as "fate" or "God's will."

Muslim-Christian intermarriage is absolutely prohibited by Christians and is permitted by Muslims only if a Muslim man marries a Christian woman. A Muslim woman is prohibited from marrying a Christian man. Culturally, intermarriage carries high disapproval and is considered shameful. In reality, though, there are instances of interfaith marriages in the West Bank in both the rural and urban areas, although there was only one among my respondents.

In sum, I reiterate my original contention that among both Christians and Muslims, everyday ordinary reality is influenced more by tradition than by religion per se, though admittedly it is difficult to delineate definitively between the two. Yet, not one woman in my entire research community attributed her problems—whatever they were—to her religion. Ranna even states that patriarchy is stronger than religion:

> *The bottom line of the whole problem for women in this society is patriarchy and male dominance. Let me give you an example. Sometimes you have sheiks, religious men, sit with a father who wants to force a young daughter out of school. They won't have any influence, because all their religious talking, their telling of Sharia rights for a woman to finish her education, and so on won't be stronger than the tradition of the father's rule. No one can force a father or a husband concerning his decisions about his wife or daughters.*
>
> —Ranna, 28, married with two children, camp resident, "not really" observant Muslim, *tawjihi* plus six-year diploma

## THE CLASS COMPONENT OF GENDER IDENTITY

Class is an additional source of identity among Palestinian camp and village women and provides an important ingredient of analysis in evaluating their position. As Julie Peteet notes, women's individual experiences and their meaning are comprehensible only within a class framework. How women discern the world around them is mediated by their class affiliation and the power, or lack thereof, that accrues from it. While there are certain commonalties that prevail across class boundaries in Palestinian society, the form and content of their position and the severity of social control to which women are subject are strongly affected by class.[45]

Class is not only an economic issue, but at the level of culture and ideology, class location shapes cultural practices, patterns of consumption, lifestyle, reproduction, and even worldview. Class divisions are reflected in differential access to power, income, and wealth. It is in this sense that class has most pertinence to gender. In West Bank society, inferior social status, subordinate class location, and economic underdevelopment have all acted upon and tended to reinforce camp and village women's "traditional" social position. Whereas upper- and upper-middle-class Palestinian women (particularly urban women) enjoy considerable autonomy with regard to decisions in such areas as education, employment, age of marriage, and number of children, village and camp women have far fewer choices. Women's lives are constricted by poverty in multiple ways—early school dropout rates, early marriage, lack of employment opportunities, high fertility rates, poor health and nutrition, extreme marital stress, and others.[46] For example, the high fertility rate (6.39–6.85) among my respondents is, in part, a consequence of economic insecurity combined with the social norm that sons will provide for them in the future. The absence of a social security safety net due to the nonexistence of a state complicates the problem even further.

Class is difficult to quantify in Palestinian society, because it intersects with *nasab* (colloquial social status) as well as other traditional vertical loyalties and identities (for example, communal cleavages such as *hamulah,* ethnicity, and religion), which are more fully articulated than class. *Nasab,* by definition, is the ascriptive, special social status that a person or family enjoys as a result of belonging to or claiming descent from a prominent family. While of secondary import to actual wealth, *nasab* functions as both an outcome and a cause in the historical process of class formation.[47] In practice, this plays out in present-day Palestinian society in a variety of ways. For example, families who today are only moderately wealthy (in terms of disposable capital) but who are from a traditionally large land-owning *hamulah* may retain the status of their prior class affiliation. Conversely, a refugee family who lost its land in 1948 but who has accumulated wealth through business or other means will continue to bear the stigma of a "low-class" refugee.

Moreover, while the elite see themselves as a distinctive class, the impoverished do not think of themselves in class terms. To borrow Halim Barakat's terminology, there are classes "in themselves" that have not developed into classes "for themselves"—that is, they have neither a class consciousness nor are they organized on the basis of class interests (except, of course, for the small wealthy upper class). Nevertheless, village and camp women are positioned just as concretely by their class location as by any other factor, and gender is very much elaborated by class.[48]

Traditionally, the class structure in the West Bank was composed of a small group of large landholding families and a large mass of peasant farmers, shareholders, and sharecroppers.[49] Today, the class picture of the West

Bank consists of three conventional classes and a new class of returnees. The conventional upper class consists of a few "big bourgeois" landholding families and a few very wealthy families (though with less *nasab*) who have made money working in Gulf countries or elsewhere abroad. Then, there is a small intermediate class of petite bourgeoisie composed of middle-level or higher bureaucrats, a few intermediate landholders, members of the white-collar professions, successful self-employed retailers and shopkeepers, and others.

Finally, there is a third class, into which fall the overwhelming majority of both the village and camp populations of the West Bank. This class comprises what might be loosely termed "a lumpen class." It includes peasants, sharecroppers, workers (in Israel and locally), lower-level bureaucrats, soldiers and policemen, street vendors and small shopkeepers, the unemployed, the underemployed, and the part-time employed. These are the powerless, preoccupied with securing their basic daily needs and vulnerable to exploitation, domination, humiliation, and illness. They are the alienated of the alienated in Palestinian society. The overall economic condition of both camp and village families ranges, as discussed above, from extremely impoverished, to poor, to a self-definition as "average"—a term that by all appearances suggests simply poverty.

As the lowest rung of the lowest class in Palestinian society, camp and village women engage in social class relations with other classes that are characterized by discrimination, exploitation, and oppression.[50] Janeen's story provides a clear example.

> *I became very active in politics through the women's union at the factory. After I got married, my husband didn't object to my political activities though he insisted I stop working. So I was active before the intifada. When it began, I participated in demonstrations, strikes, committees, and confrontations. But then the elite women came from the city and began to tell us how to organize, what to do, when to do it, and I felt very humiliated. I had actually been in the front lines—our village was very hot then—and they came and talked about their organizations, their activities, and themselves. They treated us with no respect and no appreciation—like just because we were village women we couldn't think, plan, or organize ourselves. I didn't like working with them. I felt that one had to have a lot of* wasta [mediation via a middle person with influence] *even just to talk to them. There was no professionalism. Most of the women here are relatively knowledgeable about politics and most were very active. Some stayed active but most, like me, just dropped out. It's not that we didn't care about the struggle, we did. But we couldn't take the humiliation.*
>
> —Janeen, 33, married with two children, village resident, "average" Muslim, completed ninth grade

A further dimension is that from a strictly economic standpoint, there is little difference between the situation of villagers and camp residents. However, along the social or status (*nasab*) axis, every other socioeconomic group

in the West Bank regards the camp refugees as the lowest social stratum—their actual wealth or lack thereof notwithstanding. As a consequence, there is little social interaction among nonrefugees and refugees; intermarriage carries a severe stigma and is extremely rare; and refugees are stereotyped as being dirty, backward, and ignorant. Thus, although neither articulated nor organized, class/status is clearly an important aspect of gender identity among West Bank camp and village women.

The "new" class—not strictly a class in a Marxian sense, but socially quite important—is composed of 20,000 returnees plus their families (approximately 125,000 individuals). They are Palestinians who had lived in exile for the majority (or all) of their lives but who, in the context of the Oslo Accords, were permitted to come back to the West Bank and Gaza. The vast majority of these individuals had lived in various Arab countries as well as in Europe or the United States—at least for some period in their lives. In terms of wealth, they range from a few very wealthy families, to many from the middle classes, to some from the lower classes. Most important, they brought with them a variety of different social styles, cultural norms, and experiences. All returnees had served, at one time or another, in the military, guerrilla, or political ranks of Fateh, and thus on returning they were afforded numerous economic benefits, such as housing, employment, and medical care. They also came with a unique social status in which they saw themselves and were seen by others as privileged for having lived in exile and for having participated in the PLO. Initially the local population received them with great adulation. Subsequently, however (largely due to the fact that nearly all of President Arafat's closest advisers, plus all the senior positions in the various security services and a significant portion of the high-level bureaucrats are returnees), resentments have emerged. More important is that their different lifestyles and social mores—generally more liberal than the rural or camp populations—are adding a new dynamic to traditional society and culture. Conversely, they also bring an autocratic, arrogant, and absolutist perspective to politics, and since most of the top officials in the PA are returnees, they have superimposed a strongly authoritarian political culture in the West Bank over the emerging democratic political culture of the 1970s and 1980s.

The returnees are living in a variety of locales—in urban areas, in rural villages, and in the camps—and it is likely that this new class will, in time, add another ingredient affecting the social lives of West Bank women. Three of my respondents were returnees, although two were still experiencing culture shock, a diminished economic standard of living, and geographic isolation. Still, it is reasonable to assume that they will gradually interact with society and may contribute to its transformation to a less patriarchal social system—at least that is the hope of many local intellectuals. This emerges in the words of Amal, a 20-year-old single returnee. When she is

not working or studying, she spends all her time volunteering at a refugee camp women's center (where I interviewed her), though she is not a camp resident.

> *I wanted to learn about the refugees, of whom I have always known in a very negative, stigmatized sense. . . . I believe in the refugee case. Most people think that if you live in a refugee camp you're a bad person, and I want to change this stigmatization. . . . Now that I've come to know them, these women are my best friends—the best friends I've ever had.*

Her father was a PLO official and Amal grew up in Lebanon, Tunisia, Iraq, and Somalia before coming to the West Bank. Her reflections on the social differences between herself and other West Bank women she knows are revealing.

> *The way I am socially, yes, it's very different than here. Maybe it's because of the places where I grew up—they weren't traditional, conservative places. I always studied in mixed schools where I always mixed with boys and had boys as friends. I have learned to screen good boys from bad boys; good behavior from bad behavior. My parents have always insisted that I bring home the boys that I am friends with. It's important to them to know whom I'm associating with. But once they know a boy and know he's good, they don't object to our being friends. They trust me completely. They brought me up with strict values and they know I would never do anything wrong. I would never do anything wrong! The women here can't understand this. They think if you talk to a boy it's shameful. They can't even imagine having boys as friends. Even when I tell my female friends that we are having my cousins for dinner, they are shocked that I sit, talk and eat with them. In my family that's really no big deal! But for some women here, they can't even sit with their own brothers and fathers. . . . Some of my female friends can't even come to visit me in my home—not because their parents think there is anything wrong with me or with my family, but just because they aren't allowed to leave their houses. They are so conservative and traditional.*
>
> —Amal, 20, single, lives just outside the camp, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi,* in third year at university

## THE ROLE OF GEOGRAPHIC LOCALE IN GENDER IDENTITIES

A final source of identity for Palestinian camp and village women is located in place of origin. In the West Bank, self and other are defined in geographical terms nearly as distinct as kinship and religion. An individual woman's identity resides first and foremost in her *hamulah* affiliation, second in her religious designation (Christian or Muslim), and third in her place of origin.

For Palestinians, knowing where a person is from—where she originated—is believed to provide almost as much information about the individual as knowing which clan she belongs to. Such knowledge is always evaluative and contains fixed notions about relative worth. It involves distinctions between village and village, camp and village, religious identities and religiosity, occupational categories, educational levels, degrees of adherence to traditional norms and values, intentions and motivations, and others. For example, a woman is from village XYZ; there they are "untrustworthy," or "shrewd businessmen," or "especially hospitable," or "steadfast," or "conservative," or whatever.

The point is that an individual's moral worth—her identity—is, to a significant extent, a function of where she was born. Such intense identification with one's place of origin has a variety of implications. For instance, if a woman marries a man from another village (however geographically close to her own) she will always be regarded as *gharibah* (a foreigner) by the people of that village and by herself. The negative evaluative attributes accorded refugees by nonrefugees, as noted above, makes interaction, much less intermarriage, between villagers and camp dwellers very rare.[51] The reluctance of families to allow girls to go to school outside their particular camp or village involves, in part, an evaluative judgment about "those people"—"others" who are different from themselves; and parents worry about the possible shame their daughter might face in a "foreign" village. Similarly, the first thing a camp woman will reveal about herself is her or her family's place of origin before 1948.[52]

I was continuously struck by how many times and in how many ways the issue of otherness came into play in the lives of my informants. While to the outsider the West Bank appears to be a small historically, geographically, and politically homogeneous area, from the perspective of the women living there, it resembles more a totally fragmented and isolated archipelago. Women from each locale, especially from the villages, repeatedly referred to the uniqueness of their village compared to all others.

> *School dropout is a problem in some villages. In many villages they don't care at all about educating their girls. All they care is about marrying them off as early as possible. But here, in our village, we believe in education for women and we have no dropout problem.*
>
> —Soha, 27, village resident

> *The women here are very traditional. Not like in other places where girls go out with boys and do whatever they like. In our village, we bring our girls up to be good women. Women from our village are known to be more honorable than women from other villages.*
>
> —Um Hussein, 47, village resident

*You know, the women from this village are very politically aware. They were very active during the intifada. We are not like women from other villages who care about nothing but gossip and pleasing their men.*

—Janeen, 33, village resident

*The women here—at least the Christian women—don't believe in early marriage. We don't have the problem of early marriage like so many other villages. We make sure our girls finish their education before they marry.*

—Hind, 33, village resident

*In other villages the women are so conservative, they aren't even allowed to go to a beauty salon. Here we have more freedom.*

—Melick, 40, village resident

Whether or not these self/locale descriptions are accurate, their importance resides in how the women view themselves and "others."

Locale, of course, has concrete implications as well as identity/evaluative ascriptions. One example will illustrate this point. Um Aissam was originally from a village some 10 miles from her husband's village, where she now lives. She considers herself, and is considered by others in her husband's village, as a foreigner even though she has resided there for twenty-six years. Um Aissam completed nine years of education and has a certificate in practical nursing. She worked for five years as a practical nurse before she married, at 21, to a "stranger" whom she did not see until the marriage. On their wedding night, he "beat" her, "forced" her, and thereafter was continuously violent and abusive. She "hated" him, her in-laws treated her like a "slave" and she was "miserable." When I asked her why she didn't leave him, she replied:

*That's all I thought about from the first night—night and day I thought about it. But I knew my father would never permit me to come back home. And even though I knew I could work and support myself—even after I had my first daughter, I still thought I could work and support the two of us. Later, after more children, no. But in the beginning I think it could have been feasible. But what really kept me from leaving him was that I was a foreigner here. I had no support, and no one to protect me. If I had divorced him, all the village would have said "Ah, she's a bad woman. She isn't from here. She's not leaving him, he is kicking her out." Then where would I go? Since my father wouldn't accept me back, I couldn't return to my home village. And because the people here would have made my life so miserable with their gossiping and shunning, I couldn't live here. Where to go? So, I stayed.*

—Um Aissam, 47, married with nine children, village resident, "not believing much in religion," Muslim, completed ninth grade

One explanation for the continued strength of locale in West Bank camp and village women's identity undoubtedly resides in the fact that Palestine has

never experienced national unification in an independent Palestinian state. In the absence of a nation-building process in conjunction with state building, it is logical that strong local identities would persist. It is also that most village women's kin are from her locale and have lived there for countless generations. Even refugee women identify with their particular camp (in addition to the villages from which they originated and were dispossessed). Overall, the strength of localism remains because the nation-state with its borders and passports is a very recent and artificial phenomenon in Middle Eastern history. Prior to the creation of such states, people were "from" a particular city—Halhoul, Nablus, Hebron—and moved about and traveled freely throughout the region even though it was administratively under a succession of foreign occupations. But such localism structured into identity is an additional barrier in any effort to build a Palestinian women's movement and in general does not bode well for the success of a Palestinian state should one come into being.

## SOCIAL CHANGE AND WOMEN'S IDENTITIES

The *hamulah,* as the primary basis for social organization and identity, had been slowly but continuously eroding in West Bank village and camp society since 1948. That erosion reached its high point during the intifada when Palestinians worked together cooperatively across social lines to challenge the common enemy. However, this more broadly construed community has itself been deformed and the *hamulah* system reformed as a consequence of both the post-1991 shocks to the West Bank economy and because of specific policies pursued by the Palestine Authority since 1994. Politically, Chairman Arafat has sought to reinforce his personal authority as well as the authority of Fateh, as *the* authority in West Bank politics by reinforcing *hamayel* loyalties and inter-*hamula* divisions. He has accomplished this at the expense of both democracy and women. In the words of three female Palestinian intellectuals, "President Arafat's determined revival of traditional and often discredited forms of clan-based leadership and mediation . . . excludes women from participation, as surely as it undermines political parties and the development of the institutions of civil society."[53]

The economic fallout from the 1991 Gulf War included the termination of capital remittances from West Bank laborers working in the Gulf (resulting from their en masse expulsion for political reasons) as well as the return of these workers to the West Bank, skyrocketing levels of unemployment. In addition, after the 1993 Oslo Accords and Israel's repeated, prolonged "closures" of the territories, unemployment again rose, impoverishment grew, and reliance on families for survival became the only available option for a large number of people.

These external challenges have affected West Bank camp and village women in a variety of ways. Palestinian women are daily buffeted by a complexity of forces and factors that call into question the basic elements of who they are—that is, the fundamental foundations of their identity. The frame of village and camp women's social world is in flux. On the one hand, tradition, religion, society, the media, and others tell women that their place is fixed. For example, *Jerusalem Times* commentator Mohammed Madhoum advised women that, rather than running in elections for the Legislative Council or occupying "influential positions in local institutions . . . since the foundation of the Palestinian family is the woman . . . women should stay at home and concentrate on the right upbringing of their children."[54] Yet, despite the council of Madhoum and others, women's place in society cannot be fixed, given that the frame of their world is constantly shifting and that the norms, cognitions, and relationships are constantly negotiated and renegotiated.[55] For Palestinian women, like the women in Erika Friedl's Iranian village, "the fabric of their reality-weave is continuously unraveled and rewoven in critical appraisals of individual women's choices, assumptions, and logic."[56] Several respondents illustrate these complexities. Rasha's words at the beginning of this chapter provide a departing point.

Intissar, 43, is married with six children and is employed as the headmistress of the public girls' secondary school in a village. She is Christian and describes herself as "not practicing" and in an "average" economic situation.

> *Our economic situation is very difficult. I have six children; with my husband we are eight plus, and we have full responsibility for his parents who live with us—so we are ten. . . . I have so many responsibilities. My mind is all the time on my professional work. I don't have time to fix my hair or iron my clothes. I prepare food every night for my family for the entire following day. I prepare everything for my children for school—washing and ironing their clothes, whatever they need. I don't ask my girls to help because I want them to study. I bake bread twice a week, I pickle, I prepare everything. . . . My husband? He's a teacher. But he feels nervous about helping me with the home or children. Sometimes, when we were first married he helped, but now, rarely. He's concerned that if a neighbor saw him, for example, in the kitchen or putting clothes on the line, they would say he's doing "women's work." He feels that if he helps me it demeans his manhood, because in our culture the man should work only outside the house. Still, sometimes he helps me fold the blankets in the morning. But he's very tired. I'm very tired. I don't depend on him. Sometimes I feel proud that I am doing two full-time jobs—in the home and at school. Of course, I have no time for myself.*

Um Nasser, on the other hand, has had a very different experience. She is a 33-year-old English teacher and a village resident, married with four children and expecting a fifth; an "observant" Muslim, she is in an "average" economic sit-

uation. Her husband has a university degree in engineering but cannot find work in his field. He works as a laborer at odd jobs when he can find them.

> *I'm very lucky. I love my job, and my husband is very supportive. He cleans the house, cooks, helps the children with their schoolwork, and he even does the laundry. But not all men are like him.*

Suhelaya is 27, is married with one son, is a village resident, has completed the *tawjihi* plus a training course in sewing, and is a "very religious" Christian in a "poor" economic situation.

> *Our economic situation is very bad; my husband hasn't worked for five years. I wanted to help, to contribute to the family, and I had good opportunities for work both in Birzeit and Ramallah, but my husband refused. He said it's my responsibility to stay home and take care of our son. I feel very bad about this, my psychological state is very bad, but I have no choice. I have to accept his decision. Also society says I shouldn't leave my home to go to work. So it's not just a matter of fighting my husband, I would have to fight all of society as well. This is our life. What to do?*

These women reflect both the changing and static nature of Palestinian society. The discourse of tradition conveys one norm while the economic situation demands another. Adjusted unemployment rates in the West Bank in 1996 stood at 29.3 percent,[57] and they are highest among the camp and village population. Many families cannot survive without the income of the woman when the husband is unemployed. Yet, a working wife carries the implication that her husband cannot adequately provide for his family—an important component of male honor and the basis of the Muslim marriage contract. Thus, most men would prefer impoverishment or total dependence on their paternal families to the public shame of having their wife work and having society consider them without honor. On the other hand, unemployed husbands whose wives are working have little choice about contributing, at least something, to the care of children and the home. Of necessity, in such situations, norms and relationships are negotiated and renegotiated.

The increasing need for women to find work to supplement their family's financial resources is not the only challenge to traditional gender identities. Expanding educational opportunities, for example, provides another perplexity. As Chapters 5 and 6 illustrate, while more rural and camp women are completing *tawjihi* and pursuing additional education, "too much education" decreases their likelihood of marrying and, within marriage, gives them little additional status or decisionmaking input, thus often intensifying marital conflict. Another dilemma women have faced, resulting from uncontrollable external circumstances, is that numerous women became heads of households

when their husbands left the country to seek work or when they were imprisoned or deported for political activism. When these men return home (some after five, ten, or twenty years), new relational modalities must be negotiated and renegotiated. These few examples constitute merely the tip of an iceberg that is continuously both melting and resolidifying beneath their feet.

Women's lives have become immeasurably more restricted, confined, and isolated than in earlier periods of Palestinian history. Before 1948 (and in some villages until today), village women worked in the fields, collected water and firewood, and tended livestock.[58] They were not confined to the inside of their homes. Most pre-1948 village houses were not large enough to allow for entirely separate quarters for males and females, and village women did not veil—they could not, and carry out work in the fields.[59] They covered their heads with kerchiefs and wore ankle-length, wrist-length dresses intricately embroidered with patterns unique to each village. Women visited each other frequently in culturally sanctioned visiting rituals. Working alongside their husbands in the fields afforded women a more social relationship with their spouses; moreover, their actual worth was valued for the concrete contributions they made to the sustenance of the family. More recently, other changes have occurred. During the 1970s and 1980s (before the intifada), West Bank women in general enjoyed perhaps the greatest freedom of movement in their history.

> *Starting in 1972–1973 the social life for women in the West Bank became much better. I was lucky to have lived during that period. And it wasn't just among Christians. I had many Muslim girlfriends and we went out together and worked together in voluntary and charitable organizations. The difference at that time wasn't between Christian and Muslim but between women from the cities compared to women from rural villages and refugee camps. . . . Still, while village and camp girls didn't have as much freedom as city girls, they had far more freedom than they have now. Now, in the villages, the woman can't leave her house, and the situation is little better in the camps*.
>
> —Nabela, 43, married with one child, village resident, "completely away from religion" (Christian), *tawjihi* plus three years at university and one-year diploma in secretarial skills

That is in striking contrast with the confined, devalued, isolated women one observes in the villages and camps today, clad in the drab *hijab* (Islamic scarf) and *jilbaab* (full Islamic dress).

The foregoing has illustrated the complex dimensions of West Bank rural and camp women's identities—their core formative ingredients as well as challenges to those identities. In Chapter 4, we will see precisely how the family impregnates these identities and in Chapter 6 we will observe how they are maintained and reproduced in three other major social institutions.

NOTES

1. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 39–77, esp. pp. 40–41. Also see Suad Joseph, "Introduction: Theories and Dynamics of Gender, Self, and Identity in Arab Families," Joseph, ed., *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), p. 12.

2. Joseph, "Introduction," p. 9. Joseph's work in this area has been pioneering. In addition to the sources in note 3, see Joseph, "Family as Security and Bondage: A Political Strategy of the Lebanese Urban Working Class," in Helen I. Safa, ed., *Towards a Political Economy of Urbanization in Third World Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 151–174; Joseph, "Gender and Citizenship in Middle Eastern States," *Middle East Report* 26, no. 1 (January-March 1996): 4–10; Joseph, "Elite Strategies for State Building: Women, Family, Religion and the State in Iraq and Lebanon," in Deniz Kandiyoti, ed., *Women, Islam and the State* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), pp. 176–200.

3. The concepts of "relationality" and "connectivity" have been specifically articulated and developed by Suad Joseph in many contexts. Here see Joseph, "Introduction," pp. 9–15; Joseph, "Gender and Relationality among Arab Families in Lebanon," *Feminist Studies* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1993): 465–486; Joseph, "Problematizing Gender and Relational Rights: Experiences from Lebanon," *Social Politics* (Fall 1994): 271–272.

4. Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments,* pp. 39–77.

5. Suad Joseph, "Gender and Relationality," p. 468; Joseph, "Introduction"; Joseph, *Intimate Selving in Arab Families,* p. 12.

6. Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments,* pp. 39–77.

7. Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 31–32.

8. Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy,* 1988.

9. Several good analyses of interfamily and intrafamily relations may be found in Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 18–163; Andrea B. Rugh, *Within the Circle: Parents and Children in an Arab Village* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 214–246; and Suad Joseph*, Gender and Family in the Arab World* (Washington, DC: Middle East Research and Information Project, 1994).

10. See, for example, the study by Subhi Jawabreh "Al-Arroub Refugee Camp Case Study; The Pre-'48 Homeland and Social Organization Today," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), May 29, 1998, p. 9.

11. Some observations concerning Palestinian *hamulah* may be found in Kitty Warnock, *Land Before Honor: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), pp. 19–32.

12. Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 97–98.

13. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: District Report Series (No.10), District-by-District Comparative Results, June, 1997* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997), pp. 76–79.

14. See, for example, Jawabreh, "The Pre-'48 Homeland and Social Organization Today," p. 9.

15. See the analysis by Rema Hammami "Women in Palestinian Society," in Marianne Heiberg and Geir Ovensen et al., *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank, and Arab*

*East Jerusalem: A Survey of Living Conditions,* FAFO-Report No. 151 (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Norwegian Institute for Applied Social Science, 1994), pp. 283–311.

16. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Preliminary Report, March 1996* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996), pp. 126–127.

17. Refugees, in particular, are looked down upon because they are said to have "abandoned," "run away from," and "given up" their land in 1948. Also, since 1967 and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, countless *hamayel* have lost lands due to Israeli confiscation, while in other clans, men have chosen to abandon cultivation for the wages obtainable in the Israeli labor market and in the Gulf states. For an excellent discussion of land and honor, see Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 1979), pp. 103–143, esp. pp. 126–128.

18. Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments,* p. 89.

19. Ibid., pp. 78–159.

20. For an analysis of these components of the female honor code, see ibid.

21. In villages with extremely small populations, boys and girls may go to school together through the sixth grade. In such situations, the grades are combined in one classroom (for example, first and second grades in one room), with the boys sitting in the front of the classroom and the girls in the back.

22. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), p. 173.

23. Mary Eliza Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1862), p. 121.

24. See Alessandra Antonelli, "Crimes Not Stories," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), May 22, 1998, pp. 13, 16; and Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen, "Male Versus Female Honor," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), June 5, 1998, pp. 10–11.

25. Suzanne Ruggi, "Commodifying Honor in Female Sexuality: Honor Killings in Palestine," *Middle East Report* 28, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 12–15. Also see Fanny Germain, "Killing Women in the Name of Honor," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), January 8, 1999, pp. 4–5.

26. Rula Sharkawi, "The Silent Crime: Rape and the Repeated Victimization of Women in Palestinian Society," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), March 12, 1999, pp. 6, 10.

27. Abu-Lughod, Veiled *Sentiments,* pp. 103–109.

28. A useful discussion of some of these issues may be found in Sana al-Khayyat, *Honor and Shame: Women in Modern Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 1990), pp. 21–52.

29. Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

30. Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 26.

31. Ibid., p. 36, quoting James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 85–86.

32. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 36, quoting Rosemary Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of Church," in Ruether, ed., *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974), p. 157.

33. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, pp. 28–29, quoting Aristotle, *Politica,* in *The Works of Aristotle,* vol. 10, translated by Benjamin Jowett and edited by W. D. Ross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), 1.5.1254b.

34. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam*, p. 29, quoting Aristotle, *De generatione animalium,* in *The Works of Aristotle*, vol. 5 translated by Arthur Platt and edited by J. A. Smith and W. D. Ross (Oxford: Claredon Press, 1921), 1.20.728a, 2.4.738b.

35. See the analysis by Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest for Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), pp. 107–131.

36. Armstrong, *A History of God,* pp. 132–169.

37. Hisham Sharabi, "The Dialectics of Patriarchy in Arab Society," in Samih K. Farsoun, ed., *Arab Society: Continuity and Change* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), pp. 93–94.

38. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* pp. 64–69.

39. For a useful study, see Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

40. Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society,* rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 27–34.

41. Ibid., p. 19.

42. Afzular Rahman, *Role of Muslim Women in Society* (London: Seerah Foundation, 1986), pp. 188, 208–209.

43. Ibid., p 33.

44. An excellent feminist analysis of women and Islam by a Muslim Arab scholar is Fatna A. Sabbah's *Women in the Muslim Unconscious* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984). She explores these issues from a highly innovative and provocative perspective.

45. Julie M. Peteet, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), pp. 6–8.

46. On class and gender, see, for example, Valentine M. Moghadam, "The Political-Economy of Female Employment in the Arab Region," in Nabil R. Khoury and Valentine M. Moghadam, eds., *Gender and Development in the Arab World: Women's Economic Participation: Patterns and Policies* (London: Zed Books, 1995), pp. 6–13.

47. Barakat, *The Arab World,* p. 85.

48. See, for example, Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy,* pp. 38–40; and Barakat, *The Arab World*, pp. 12–27.

49. Barakat, *The Arab World,* p. 82.

50. Ibid., p. 94.

51. For a good relevant analysis, see Suzanne Ruggi, "Underlying Prejudices: How Some Palestinians View the Refugee Camp Dwellers," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), July 10, 1998, p. 7.

52. A detailed discussion of the relationship between identity and place of origin in a Moroccan context is provided by Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality,* pp. 18–60.

53. Rita Giacaman, Islah Jad, and Penny Johnson, "For the Common Good? Gender and Social Citizenship in Palestine," *Middle East Report* 26, no. 1 (January-March 1996): 12. For other important analyses in this regard, see Ada Ushpiz, "Sweet Taste of Revenge: Arafat's Move to Institutionalize the Sub-culture of Blood Revenge," *Ha'aretz Week's End* (Jerusalem, Israeli weekly, English), September 4, 1998, p. B2; and Fathi Khamis Al-Ja'bari, "No More Tribalism: We Have the Law," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), April 3, 1998, p. 5.

54. Mohammed Madhoum, "Women and the Family," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), September 11, 1998, p. 5.

55. For a similar evaluation of women's situation in Iranian villages, see Erika Friedl, "Notes from the Village: On the Ethnographic Construction of Women in Iran,"

in Fatma Muge Gocek and Shiva Balaghi, eds., *Reconstructing Gender in the Middle East: Tradition, Identity and Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 92–93.

56. Friedl, "Notes from the Village," p. 93.

57. UNSCO, *UNSCO Report on Economic and Social Conditions in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Spring 1998,* United Nations Office of the Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, Gaza, April 15, 1998, pp. 16–17.

58. For a rich and detailed description of Palestinian women's lives the mid-nineteenth century, see Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine.*

59. Warnock, *Land Before Honor,* pp. 19–35.

# 4

# Women and the Family

> [S]he always has to be so careful it now seems to her as though she's acting a role: the perfect wife. It is *fraudulent.* And the worst sham of all is how they pretend they're normal people with nothing at all odd about their marriage. Not how they pretend to the world—that is necessary—but how they pretend to each other. This is the worst bit. He is living this lie and forcing her to live it too. *That's* what he's doing—continually. . . .
>
> Oh, but she tries: she tries to do what he wants, and when he wants nothing she tries to be that too. She tries on her own to do the things that would make her be all right so that when she's with him she can be the way he wants her to be. . . .
>
> And, "Romance"? Well, maybe they *are* linked: maybe if "Sex" was all right "Romance" would follow; that is what happens in arranged marriages, isn't it?
>
> —Ahdaf Soueif, *In the Eye of the Sun*

In all Arab countries, the family is still considered the axis of society—in political, economic, social, and religious terms. For example, as Suad Joseph points out, access to institutions, jobs, and government services is often mediated through family connections: worker recruitment and discipline, wages, and benefits typically reflect kinship ties; and many national constitutions in Arab states enshrine the privileged position of the family.[1]

Palestine is unique in the Arab world for never having achieved national independence or self-government. Thus, even many of the "modernizing" developments in neighboring countries have not occurred here. Moreover, in the absence of a state, there are no public programs that could support women, such as unemployment compensation, daycare centers, old age benefits, welfare programs, adult living facilities, or centers for the special needs of hand-

icapped children. Thus, women retain all their traditional responsibilities, roles, and relations and have little choice but to rely on the family. This situation has been exacerbated by the Palestine Authority's policy of strengthening traditional kinship structures to maximize its own political support.[2] As a result, personalism, kinship ties, and political affiliation remain the most important determinants in the distribution of values and resources. Women have been particularly adversely affected by this situation.[3]

For example, in a 1998 article in *Palestine Report,* an independent Palestinian weekly publication, Iyad Sarraj, a psychiatrist and the director of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens' Rights (PICCR), told this story. A woman had taken a test for a position in one of the international agencies for refugee affairs. She scored third highest on the test while a colleague scored highest. The person who was hired for the job, however, had received the lowest score of all the applicants, but "she is related to the head of the department in this agency." The woman complained to Sarraj that "everything these days is through the connections you have. . . . As far as the qualified and diligent citizen is concerned, he/she has no chance." Sarraj attempted to convince the woman to file a formal complaint through the PICCR, but she initially declined, arguing that if she filed such a complaint, "I would never have a chance to work in that agency for the rest of my life." Sarraj countered that such things could only change if individuals like her dared to complain and stand up for what is right. The conversation continued for some time whereupon the woman suddenly stated emphatically, "You are right . . . we are scared of humans while we should only be afraid of God." She asked for a pen and paper and wrote out a detailed and lengthy complaint; she signed it and left it with Sarraj for followup by the PICCR. The next day the woman returned to the office with three male family members who demanded that Sarraj "stop interfering in family affairs" and insisted that the woman's complaint be given to them. Sarraj had to comply, and without the written complaint, the PICCR had no basis for action. The woman's male relatives were apparently concerned that if their sister/daughter offended the department head (and by extension his family), it might cause problems for them in terms of their future employment or other opportunities, or in additional matters in which this family holds sway.[4]

Despite the foregoing comments, family structure in West Bank camp and village society has experienced processes of deformation, transformation, and reformation since 1948. In particular, the idealized family formation (though rarely occurring even prior to 1948) involving a senior patriarch and his wife living together in harmony and cooperation—with all their married sons, their wives, and their children—is virtually nonexistent. The few families in my research community who live this way, such as one village clan of four brothers, their wives, and fifteen children (who share one kitchen, one

bathroom, and one sitting room), do so because poverty leaves them no alternatives.

Nevertheless, beginning with the *nakba* and accelerating after 1967, there have been numerous changes in family living arrangements. Wars, dispossession, social fragmentation, displacement, foreign rule, and political, social, and economic insecurity assaulted families in a variety of ways. Peasants became refugees; there was rural-urban migration within the West Bank; villages experienced new social differentiation; and economic stress led to emigration.[5] Indeed, many men went abroad. Some of them left wives and children behind; others acquired new families in their new countries.[6] Yet, when husbands or fathers were absent, women's nearest male relatives became their guardians. There is little evidence to suggest that such women acquired any new rights or freedoms, only more responsibilities.

By the 1980s, at least one son from most families was living and working in one of the Gulf countries where employment was available and wages were considerably higher than in the West Bank. These sons typically sent a significant part of their earnings home to their fathers—in 1986, for example, nearly 50 percent of West Bank GNP came from net factor payments (remittances) from abroad.[7] With the eruption of the intifada in 1987, families were further sundered as a consequence of deportations, prolonged imprisonments, debilitating injuries, and deaths. Many women acquired additional responsibilities and suffered great hardships, although some also experienced new, short-lived forms of freedom through participation in demonstrations and other political activities. Yet, for most camp and village women this was a period of increased restrictions—restrictions on their freedom of movement, on their ability to acquire education, and on their wish to postpone marriage beyond adolescence.

After the 1991 Gulf War and the expulsion of all Palestinians from Kuwait and other countries, many men who had lived abroad for decades returned home. Some returned to their wives and children expecting to resume their traditional authority. Others brought new families back to live in their fathers' homes. In both situations, women experienced extraordinary pressures. Most of these men have been unable to find adequate—or any—employment in the West Bank and are now living with their wives and children in significantly diminished economic circumstances. The wives of men who had married in other countries went from lifestyles of comfort and independence to economic deprivation under the control of their in-laws. The wives of men who had remained in the West Bank went from relative independence to subservience to long-absent husbands. Both groups were the least contented women in my research community.

In the 1990s, the traditional patriarchal family has been reinforced as a consequence of the coalescence of several factors. These include classic

forms of family intradependence concurrent with the general tendency in Arab-Palestinian culture to enshrine the family as the marrow of society in conjunction with the particular twentieth-century political and economic history of the West Bank, plus the specific policies pursued by the PA. Moreover, in a condition of poverty and where the absence of external alternatives reinforces the individual's dependence on the family, individual loyalty and commitment to, sacrifice for, and subordination of personal desires to family interests is absolutely mandatory—and it is women who subordinate and sacrifice the most.

Mary's story illustrates one example of the disruptions caused by migration and return. She married at 16 and had four children when, in 1957, her husband decided to go to Latin America to find work. At 24, Mary was left with four young children to raise. Her husband started a business in Brazil and within three years began regularly sending money home, thus easing Mary's financial burden if not her loneliness and responsibilities. In 1965, concerned about the viability of her marriage, Mary went to Brazil to visit her husband, leaving her four children "temporarily" in the care of her brother and his wife. I talked with two of these daughters, now in their forties, and they have only bitter memories of an initial abandonment by their father and a subsequent abandonment by their mother. Once in Brazil, Mary's husband pleaded with her to remain and help him in his business. She stayed until 1973, had five more children, and remembers those years as "full and happy." By 1973, however, Mary's brother asked her to return to resume caring for her children. Mary, in turn, pleaded with her husband to come back to the West Bank and rebuild their family life. He refused, arguing that the money in Rio de Janeiro was too good to leave. So, Mary came back alone with her five new children. Again without her husband, now with nine children to raise, Mary tried to resume her life.

> *It was difficult, very difficult. I felt abandoned by my husband, my first four children were angry with me for leaving them, my youngest children couldn't adjust to village life—they missed their father and all the things there were to do in Rio. I didn't think I would survive.*

Nevertheless, she did survive; indeed she managed on her own for the next twenty years and raised, educated, and married all her children. In 1993, Mary's husband returned to the village, and the life she had created for herself and her children was shattered.

> *It had been so long, I never expected to see him again. But I had to accept him. He is my husband. My children told me to be patient that in time things would work out, but they haven't. After Rio, the village is like being on the*

*moon for him. He has nothing to do and nowhere to go. He's nervous and angry all the time. He screams at me a lot. I try to please him, but there is really no pleasing him. My life has been turned upside down so many times. . . . I guess that is my fate. That's the life God gave me.*

—Mary, 65, married with nine children, village resident, "very observant" Christian, no education

Another story comes from Nur, whose family was originally from the village in which she now lives. After the occupation, her father moved to Kuwait in search of work. Nur was born in Kuwait but lived in Amman after 1991, when all Palestinians were expelled from Kuwait. Her husband is a second cousin from the same West Bank village who met Nur when he visited Amman. They were married in Amman after one week, then her husband brought her back to the village.

*I loved Amman. I could wear whatever I wanted, go wherever I wanted; it was much more open. Life here in the village is extremely restricted compared to life in Amman. Until now I haven't learned to cope—even the ways of thinking and attitudes of the people are so different, so conservative. . . . I have to be careful of how I say things. If I say something perfectly normal and simple, people will interpret it in their own way and will distort it some way to my disadvantage. Here everyone knows what everyone else does and says. It's terribly confining and there is nothing to do—no restaurants, no cafes, and no shops. If I want to go to Ramallah, people will gossip without end. So, I just stay in my house. I've never felt so isolated or depressed in my life.*

—Nur, 26, married with one child and pregnant, village resident, "not very observant" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Um Tallal, though born in Hebron, left the West Bank in 1967 with her family when her father emigrated to seek employment. She is married to a returnee; they had lived in Iraq before coming back to the West Bank. Her husband is a refugee from 1948, and they are at present living in "very poor" circumstances in a refugee camp.

*We had a good life in Iraq. My husband earned good money and we lived reasonably well. . . . The situation of Iraqi women is much better than here. Women have more freedom there, they can visit friends, go shopping, do whatever they want. They take their rightful place in society. But here in the camp, it's very different. Women can't go outside their homes because if they do, people start gossiping and talking. I feel women don't have any rights here and society interferes in everything. This interference affects women very strongly and constrains them totally. Between our economic situation and the confinement, my psychological situation is very bad.*

—Um Tallal, 48, married with eleven children, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

It is not difficult to imagine the myriad problems faced by all women who have been affected, in one way or another, by the necessity for West Bank men to seek employment or to move for any reason outside their traditional locale.

## FAMILY ROLES: ABSORPTION OF GENDER DISCOURSES AND THE PROCESS OF SOCIALIZATION

The family is the most important institution in which females are indoctrinated in the obligations, expectations, and roles that society demands of them. The familial process by which this occurs is socialization. Moreover, since the family is the paramount institution in which women are expected to carry out their socially defined roles as wives and mothers, the family's part in socializing females into the web of family connectivity is pivotal. In addition, since West Bank camp and village families are the primary providers of the individual members' material and emotional needs—identity, marriage, work, shelter, clothing, moral guidance, affection—family members must be socialized not only to assume their proper roles and obligations, but also to place family interests before any individual needs, desires, or interests. Children must be taught that their futures are inextricably bound up in other peoples' perceptions of their family, and a child has to understand that she is marked by her family's reputation just as thoroughly as she is responsible for it. The fear of tarnishing the family image is a strong inducement to self-control for children of all ages.[8] The following examines the practices and principles that are instrumental in this process of primary socialization.

### *Wives, Mothers, and Daughters: Primary Socialization and Child-Rearing Methods*

In West Bank camps and villages, childcare—especially in the first six years—is entirely women's work. The fact that this process occurs in the context of a highly charged emotional attachment to significant others renders it the deepest and most intense phase of socialization and the period when a child internalizes the reality accent of "knowledge." Mothers and older sisters—perhaps also aunts and grandmothers—are *the* significant others for girls (and boys). Fathers are rarely at home. They typically work during the day, come home for the afternoon meal, rest a while, and go out with their friends in the evening. One woman described this situation and its implications for social change.

> *It's very hard to find men at home—day or night. They work during the day and they go out at night to cafes, to play cards, whatever. Most people think*

*the last word in the home is with men but it's actually with the women. In every house, there is some period for discussion between husband and wife—even if it's only in bed. If we could somehow convince mothers to socialize their children with better values than we've been brought up with, they could convince the fathers later, then maybe there would be hope for change in this society.*

—Ramza, 32, married with two children and pregnant, camp resident, "not that religious" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

The fact that women are the primary as well as the secondary transmitters of social and cultural norms is enormously significant in comprehending the persistence of the gendered division of labor. As mothers, but also as the pillars of "everyday reality"—as sisters, mothers-in-law, aunts, teachers, and more—it is women who teach girls the rightness or the truth of their traditionally defined roles, responsibilities, relations, and restrictions. Mothers provide their daughters with role models and administer the daily admonitions concerning what things are *haram,* e*ib,* and *mamnoua*.[9] A particularly apt comment in this regard came from Sohar, a university graduate seeking work in her field of science.

*The major problem that women have to face here is the society itself. If a woman achieves a good position, people denigrate her and say, "She's just a woman—what she says and thinks isn't important because she's a woman. Why listen to her?" We even hear such things from educated people, and we hear it more from women than men. If we could change women's thinking, I'm sure things would get better for women in general. I think women denigrate successful women because they are raised by their mothers to believe that men are superior, more intelligent, more rational. So they aren't used to dealing with a woman who is making decisions or holding a professional position. Women really believe that such things belong in the domain of men, and women should be at home and accepting men's authority. Worse, it is women who continuously transmit and reinforce these ideas. I think women pose a greater obstacle to change for women than men do. For example, when I was at university I was treated with genuine respect by my professors and fellow students (all male). The few girls I did know were just petty.*

—Sohar, 23, single, village resident, "not that religious" (Muslim), *tawjihi* plus B.S.

At the same time, I pondered the comments of Um Nabil, whose husband works in a kitchen in a nearby Israeli settlement. Her entire family and her mother-in-law live in three small, dilapidated rooms.

*I hate my [four] daughters. I don't see any reason to educate girls. As soon as somebody comes for their hands, I'm going to marry them off. They are*

*clever in school but I don't care—girls just create problems. My oldest daughter is 12 and we are extremely concerned about her honor—it is our main concern. I don't like girls; I don't even like women. I love my baby, though—she's still at the breast.*

—Um Nabil, 35, married with eight children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Um Nabil's candor is unusual, and certainly not all women share her perspective. Moreover, when I asked her if her economic situation were better, might she feel differently about her daughters, she said, yes. The fact that she loves her nursing baby may suggest that it is not so much that she hates girls per se, rather that her concerns about maintaining her older daughter's honor overwhelm her. Her "dislike" of women in general, may attest to her fear about their gossiping about her daughters. Another woman made a similar statement in this regard and the reason may be similar:

*I don't like women in general. I like to be alone. I like quiet and solitude. I don't like to interact with other women.*

—Hager, 29, married with five children, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Yet, at a fundamental level, attitudes toward women in this society are not positive, and girls internalize this at an early age.

Women socialize not only their daughters but also their sons. In this regard, the comments of Um Nazar are revealing. One of her daughters, Intissar, 19, left school in the eleventh grade because "she couldn't adjust to a new school environment." The family is among the returnees. Intissar stated, when we talked, that she very much wanted to work, but that her brother would not allow her. (The father is present in the home.) When, I asked Um Nazar about this, she replied:

*It's our custom for men to control women. I want to encourage my son to have the character of a man. If he controls his sisters now, he will be a real man in the future and he will know how to control his wife. It's up to him to determine what his sisters can and cannot do.*

—Um Nazar, 43, married with seven children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed sixth grade

Suad Joseph has analyzed the brother-sister relationship in depth, and she reports a more complex dynamic than the foregoing suggests.[10] I did not question Intissar about some of the dimensions of her relationship with her brother that Joseph explored. Numerous young respondents, however, reported control by their brothers. Nayra's comments are typical:

*I fight a lot with my older brother because he tries to control all my behavior and always orders me around. Unfortunately, my father gives him all the freedom to control my behavior. If I want to visit a girlfriend in the camp, I have to ask my older brother. When he says "no," as he always does, I go to my father and he says, "Whatever your brother says, goes." I love my brother but I wish he would change the way he treats me. He's doing* tawjihi *now and I hope he passes.*

—Nayra, 16, single, camp resident,
"average" Muslim, in tenth grade

Nayra's statement reflects more of the complexities of the brother-sister relationship explored by Joseph—that is, love and caring as well as control.

Children—females and males—perceive their mothers in their roles as mother and wife: as submissive and obedient, as housekeepers, childbearers, and cooks. On the other hand, mothers are children's main source of affection and love, giving them emotional support and warmth. Moreover, it is the mother who molds the children—she raises them, instructs them in proper behavior, and reports their misdeeds to their fathers. Thus, while a father may be "loved" out of respect or fear, mothers are usually deeply cherished in their children's hearts. This accounts, in part, for the enduring mother-son bond even after sons marry. Yet the mother-daughter relationship contains a number of inherent contradictions.[11]

Since it is the mother's explicit role to bring up her daughters according to the values and standards of society, she herself must not adopt any constructively critical attitudes toward those standards. Andrea Rugh has examined mother-daughter dynamics in a rural Syrian Christian village family, and her findings' correlate with what I observed in my research community.[12] To fulfill her duty of socializing her daughters, the mother does not allow herself to become too close to them. After a girl reaches five or six, most mothers appear to provide little physical affection (yet continue to shower warmth and affection on sons). Mothers and daughters do household tasks together, but the relationship seems more that of a teacher and pupil. After a daughter marries, a mother can relax somewhat in her obligations to model her daughter for her appropriate social role and ensure her daughter's honorable behavior. Thus, the emotional relationship between mother and daughter usually strengthens considerably after a daughter marries.[13]

Very young children of both sexes experience few restraints on their behavior—their needs and demands are typically met with considerable indulgence. However, as they grow older, while boys continue to be treated with great leniency, girls are disciplined, restrained, and taught to assume household responsibilities and to meet the demands of their fathers and brothers. Family responsibilities and obligations are gendered at a very young age.

"Good" and "bad" behavior is also highly gendered and is determined according to how a given action or attitude affects the family. For instance, young boys can roam the streets and play freely with other boys, whereas young girls are kept very close to home and usually only play inside the house or very near to it. Both girls and boys are explicitly taught to put the interests of the family before the interests of the individual. But, because girls are rewarded for being submissive, quiet, and obedient, they tend to develop passive personalities, while boys are given much more leeway, though they too are expected to obey their parents. Most girls are discouraged from having independent opinions or expressing ideas that contradict parents' admonitions.[14]

Beginning by age 5 or 6, girls are required to begin assuming simple tasks. As they grow older—by 9 or 10—they develop ownership of family work and make sure it is done, even if the mother is not present. They also assume increasing obligations with respect to younger siblings. By the time a girl is 10 or 12, she may have complete responsibility for her younger brothers and sisters. Through these practices, girls are prepared for their roles as wives and mothers.[15] Lafita expresses her not atypical experience growing up.

> *I never felt that I had a childhood. I always felt like an adult. My grandparents lived with us when I was a girl, and all I remember about that period was the endless responsibilities I and my sisters had caring for these two old, sick, dying people. There was no time for playing or doing childish things—it was all responsibility. I didn't notice any change in my life when I became a woman—when I got my period—it was just more of the same responsibilities.*
>
> —Lafita, 19, single with seven siblings, camp resident, "average," Muslim, completed twelfth grade but failed *tawjihi*

The familial mode of working together means that girls do not have individualized tasks or receive parental recognition for excellence in a particular activity, a fact that Rugh argues contributes significantly to female passivity and to the internalization of family interests over individual ones.[16] My observations suggest that such practices foster the development of girls' identity in a familial relational and connective context. Also, in West Bank camp and village society, children tend to share everything—clothes, toys, bedrooms—and everything is passed on from older to younger children. The notion of "mine" as in my shirt, my ball, my bed is virtually unknown. Nor is there any concept of privacy. By the same token, families usually eat the main meal of the day together (around 2:00 or 3:00), and this is a central ritual of family unity. Women spend the greater part of the day shopping for food and preparing the meal while men look forward to, and rarely miss, coming home for this occasion. It is almost unthinkable for an individual family member to eat outside of the home during this meal except under extreme circumstances.[17] On the other hand, in the camps and the villages, women typically serve the men their

food, then retire to a separate room and wait until the men have finished. Only then do the women and children eat, by themselves, and only what is left from the men's platter. This practice has very negative implications for women's nutritional status and is discussed in the section on health in Chapter 6. It is also a vivid illustration of gender hierarchies.

Families make all decisions for their children—major as well as the small ones of everyday life.[18] Bahiga commented in this regard:

> *A big problem here is that the family determines the life of its daughters. For example, sometimes a girl wants to finish school or to postpone marriage, but the family decides whether she can finish school and when she will marry. Of course, they choose whom she will marry too. Families decide everything for girls.*
>
> —Bahiga, 29, engaged, village resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

Hania added:

> *One of the main problems here is the way girls are brought up. Most girls today go to school, that's not the problem. The problem is that they are taught in the home from day one that the most important priority in life is to get married and have a family. So, many girls, even those who have the opportunity, don't dedicate much time or energy to studying. They don't take school seriously.*
>
> —Hania, 17, single, village resident, "not observant" Muslim, in eleventh grade

Um Samir illustrates this observation:

> *When I was a young girl, my only dream was to get married to a nice man and have a family. Thank God, I got my wish. As a woman, no matter how much education you get, or how good a profession you have, you always end up in the kitchen.*
>
> —Um Samir, 23, married (at 16) with two children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, completed tenth grade

Children are not encouraged to think independently. Rather, parents decide what they will eat, when they will eat, what they will wear, who they can play with, what subjects they can and cannot discuss, what tasks they should do, and so on. One young girl described how this affects her:

> *I'd love to study music but my family won't permit it. Girls simply don't study music; it's inconceivable here. Also, because of what people will say—rumors—because I would have to go to Ramallah to study. But basically it's that the people in the village, including my parents, don't understand or*

> *appreciate music. So they couldn't comprehend why I would be going out to study it.*
>
> —Bodur, 17, single, village resident, "not religious" Muslim, in eleventh grade

Children, especially girls, are expected to obey all their parents' directives, and not to express their own needs or wishes.

One of the ways mothers exercise control over children is the threat of telling their fathers about some offense and the child's fear of the father's retribution. Thus, as Rugh has observed, children reared in such a manner are not likely to rebel. Instead, they learn to negotiate their way through problems so as not to upset the relationship of respect with a parent. "Children treated in this way look to others for direction. Not being accustomed to weighing the pros and cons of an argument, they are inclined to accept authoritarian statements as true in the almost absolute sense."[19] Children socialized in such a manner are also unlikely to develop their reasoning faculty, and creativity, initiative, and critical thinking are suppressed. However, it is important to note that this situation is not solely a function of the family culture. Palestine as well as the rest of the Arab world has been in a dependent political, economic, and intellectual situation vis-à-vis the West for centuries. Survival—whether for Arab regimes in the international system, Arab citizens in relation to their governments, or children at home—has depended on the acceptance of subordination and obedience to the "rules of the game." Of note here is Hisham Sharabi's perspective, drawn out in his book *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society,* that the problems in the Arab political order (for example, the absence of personal freedom, democracy, pluralism, and civil societies) are a consequence of, among other factors, the hierarchical relations that originate in the family.[20]

### *Husbands, Fathers, and Daughters*

When fathers are at home, they seldom interact with the children except perhaps to play with them briefly and to discipline them. Fathers expect their children to be well behaved in their presence, and if they annoy or displease their fathers, they typically experience harsh verbal reprimands and possible physical abuse. The overwhelming majority of respondents related that they had been beaten as children, and many stated that they believe that physical punishment is an appropriate method for disciplining children. It is usually fathers, rather than mothers, who actually inflict physical punishment. Moreover, although fathers may not be present when a child's misdeed occurs, mothers relate children's transgressions to fathers on their arrival home, and

the fathers administer the punishment. Thus, fathers are perceived, in the first instance, as authoritarian both by the way they deal with the children and in the way they treat their wives, which often involves verbal abuse and may include physical violence. Children learn at an early age to fear their fathers. Beyond that, fathers are usually seen as distant and uninvolved in family life.

Conversely, I found it particularly interesting that among the women in my research community who stood apart from the norm in any respect—educational attainment, employment, political involvement—all but one credited their fathers with having been the strongest influence in their lives. One example will suffice here. Karma is an elected member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

> *I've been active in politics since I was in high school. At university, I was a leader in Fateh but I was also an excellent student. We are twelve children; neither my father nor mother had any education. My father is a truck driver so we are not well off but we are not as poor as some of the families in the camp. My father was very strong on education and insisted that all of us—boys and girls—get university degrees. Also, my father was not as constrained by the cultural norms as other fathers. He didn't care about gossip and such, although we all had to behave properly. He didn't allow any of us to marry until we had completed our education. I guess my father, although illiterate himself, was ahead of his generation on women's issues. The ideas he held concerning the importance of education, the importance of contributing to and having a respected position in society, and of not marrying young weren't so common among the men of his time. The way my father dealt with my mother was important to me too. We didn't grow up feeling that our only function in life was to produce children. We kids were treated with respect and as human beings, as was our mother. My father has always been my strongest supporter—the most important thing in my life has been his encouragement.*
>
> —Karma, 32, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.S.

Even among women not in exceptional situations, I frequently heard the same sentiment. Amina is typical.

> *The type of father a girl has is the most important thing in determining how she will fare in life—for example, whether she finishes school or is forced out; whether she's forced into early marriage or has some choice; whether she works or not. Still, I believe that men have to control women because they are wiser.*
>
> —Amina, 34, single, camp resident, a "Muslim Sister," *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Yet, the fact remains that few fathers take an active, positive role in their daughters' upbringing.

## STAGES IN WOMEN'S LIFE CYCLE

### *Puberty, Repression, Seclusion, and Ignorance of Self*

By puberty, girls are completely separated from boys. Parents' fears about potential threats to their daughters' honor reach a peak at this point. Since family honor is dependent on the sexual chastity of its female members, the transformation of girls to women during puberty mandates their segregation and seclusion and subjects them to continuous vigilance. British scholar of Palestinian society Maria Holt writes that as West Bank girls reach adolescence, social prohibitions intensify and she is made to feel

> afraid for her safety and afraid of "males" and of "people's talk," or gossip. The men in her family—especially the father and older brothers—sometimes increase their efforts to make her submissive. The family begins to watch her closely, and to question any movement they see as out of the ordinary. This can cause a great deal of distress as a girl begins to feel that her family does not trust her. Emotionally, she may begin to feel that she is merely a body that must be watched constantly.[21]

The problem is compounded by the fact that discussion of any issue related to sexuality is prohibited in camp and village families. Girls are so ignorant of sexual matters that if a boy looks at them, they feel that they have been violated and, worse, that they are responsible for it. Most of my respondents related that they had never heard about menstruation until they saw their first blood. Women's ignorance about their bodies and their sexuality is but one—though an enormously important—aspect of patriarchal control. Parents intentionally keep their children as ignorant as possible to maximize their control and to ensure their daughters' conformity to the honor code.

Puberty is a particularly traumatic time for girls. Besides having almost no information about the emotional and physical changes they are undergoing, their parents' treatment of them suddenly changes. They are denied what little freedom they had previously enjoyed, and their mothers become as oppressive and dictatorial as their fathers. Both parents apply intense pressure on their daughters to conform to and obey every order that is issued. The mother's vocabulary, in exchanges with her daughter, narrows to *haram, eib,* and *mamnou.* As Palestinian analyst Safa Tamish relates, "Instead of helping their children undergo the difficult physiological and emotional transformation of that period, parents prefer to ignore the issue or at best give superficial and often misleading information." Instead, authoritarian absolutism simply results in the issuance of a new set of orders to be obeyed: "Don't touch, don't do, don't try, don't love, don't talk to, don't look at, don't be seen, don't."[22] In fact, several respondents revealed that the combination of the new restric-

tions, plus the heavy load of home responsibilities and their "role" socialization, produced a strong desire to marry at 13 or 14 to escape their parents' house. One young woman told me:

> *I can't wait to get married. Marriage is good because it gets you out of your family's house and you go to your husband's house and have no more troubles.*
>
> —Rose, 16, single, camp resident, "not observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

And, somehow, despite what they had experienced at home, all these girls had (before actually getting married) idealistic notions about the bliss of married life. An older woman made a similar comment:

> *I had no idea of what marriage was really all about when I agreed to get married at 16. I didn't know about all the responsibilities, the problems of raising children, in-laws, sex—I didn't know anything. Even now, although I understand, it's overwhelming. If girls knew what marriage was really all about, they would never get married. I guess that's why they are married off as young as possible.*
>
> —Um Jamil, 40, camp resident, married (at 16 to first cousin) with seven children, "very observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Returning for a moment to puberty, the nature of child-rearing practices means that even puberty is not a period of rebellion. The roles and obligations of obedience in the social hierarchy have been so thoroughly inculcated throughout childhood that even the psychic and biological rages of adolescence do not appear to upset the stability of family roles and relationships.[23] My observations suggest that girls internalize the conflicts they experience at this time, rather than expressing them in "acting out" or other behaviors. Several of these issues were reflected in Muna's comments.

> *There are so many problems for teenage girls because they are undergoing lots of physical and psychological changes and they feel very shameful—especially about the changes in their bodies. Girls can't cope with the fact that they are becoming teenagers and this causes serious psychological problems. I know because I went through all this myself. When I was in the ninth grade, and all these changes in my body began, my grades dropped from the high nineties to the low eighties. This was a disaster for me and I felt doubly bad—first about the changes and second about the drop in my grades. I didn't understand the connection. I guess all girls go through this but I felt very alone at the time. I didn't have anyone to talk to so I just kept to myself.*
>
> —Muna, 18, single (engaged), village resident, "very observant" Muslim, preparing for *tawjihi*

For many camp and village girls, puberty is followed directly by betrothal and marriage. Even for girls who marry later, the time between puberty and marriage remains as repressive, secluded, restricted, and supervised as the period of puberty itself. Most young women in this community have no opportunity for independence of any sort between girlhood and marriage.

### *Betrothal*

There are differences between betrothal practices in the Muslim community and the Christian community. The latter are more lenient, undoubtedly because divorce is prohibited in Middle Eastern Christianity—Roman and Orthodox. Yet, although Muslim women have a legal right to divorce, the circumstances that allow it are quite circumscribed and divorced women carry such a strong social stigma that few women ever consider initiating divorce and intensely fear being divorced by their husbands. Thus, regardless of betrothal practices, for women in both communities marriage is very much a finality.

In the Christian community, most girls become engaged and marry somewhat later than Muslim girls, usually after *tawjihi,* although the problem of early marriage exists there as well—especially in the rural villages. Christian girls are engaged for a period (which may be as short as a week or as long as a year) before they are married. Christian engagement entails the man giving the prospective wife a gift as a symbol of his commitment. The gift may be a token or it may be substantial, depending on the man's financial circumstances. The man, however, is solely responsible for the expenses of the wedding party and for preparing and furnishing a house for himself and his new wife. During the engagement period, the couple usually has some opportunity, albeit under supervision, to get to know each other. If a girl changes her mind during this period, she can break the engagement without incurring shame. In addition, she will be fully acceptable to another man as a marriage partner—so long as she is a virgin and there has been no *namima* (bad talk) about her.

In the Muslim community, when a man asks for a girl's hand and she gives her consent, they are considered betrothed. The betrothal *(khutba*) is a negotiated agreement between the fathers or guardians (in the absence of a father) of the prospective bride and groom.[24] According to Sharia, with certain exceptions, women are not entitled to negotiate their own marriage contracts. Young girls feel enormous pressure to accept their father's choice of a husband and typically agree to the man he selects. (The issue of girls' choice in matters related to marriage is discussed in Chapter 5.) The negotiations involve the amount of the dowry (*mahr*—a sum of money) that the man must give the woman. The *mahr* is legally the property of the woman, although occasionally a father takes it for himself. The *mahr* is divided into two parts: the

"prompt" dower, which is paid when the marriage contract (*sahih*) is registered in court, and the "deferred" dower, which the groom promises to pay the woman if he divorces her and his family promises to pay in case of their son's death.[25] The prospective bride usually uses the prompt dower to purchase gold jewelry, which she considers an investment in her future, plus new clothes for the wedding and after. The groom is solely responsible for the wedding party as well as for providing a furnished residence for the couple. The *khutba* itself is not a binding legal contract and may be broken by either party.[26] However, as soon as the contract *(sahih*) is written, signed, and registered with the Sharia court, a Muslim girl is considered legally married.[27] Typically, in the West Bank, the *sahih* is registered within days of the *khutba* agreement, although the actual wedding—the culminating night of a communal party given by the groom's family—may not take place for weeks, months, or, in some cases, years.

One of the most important rights Sharia gives a woman is the opportunity to write conditions into her marriage contract.[28] Yet, almost none of the women in my research community had taken advantage of this protection. A woman can, in principle, stipulate anything she wishes in the contract—for example, that she be allowed to finish her education or to work, or that she not be subject to violence.[29] The overwhelming majority of respondents over 25 stated that they were unaware, at the time they married, that they could put conditions into the contract. Many of the younger women were also unaware of this right, but among those who did know about it before marrying, they either chose not to make use of it or they employed it to demand that furniture and other household goods be put in their name. Of those who chose not to use it, most were strongly discouraged or prohibited by their guardians/fathers, because it would be shameful to show such distrust—especially in first-cousin marriages. One of many typical comments came from Um Hisham:

> *My daughter is an excellent student and we would like her to continue her university education after she marries. In fact, we specifically asked the prospective groom's parents to agree to this. . . . No, of course we didn't write it into the marriage contract—the marriage is within the family. We must accept their word. We are Arabs. With Arabs their word is their bond.*
>
> —Um Hisham, 43, married with seven children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

A few girls were simply afraid that if they made any serious stipulations, the man would refuse to marry them, or his family would be very upset.

On the other hand, one of my respondents used the marriage contract to ensure her right to finish her education and to work. Muna, the youngest of eight siblings, will be the first in her family to attend college or university.

*I wrote two conditions into my marriage contract. The first is that I can complete my university education. I definitely plan to complete my university education. I plan to study either history or law. I will go to university. . . . Yes, I'm certain I'll be accepted. My average in school is 95. I don't have any doubts about passing the tawjihi. . . . My fiancé is a university graduate. . . . I knew him; yes, he's my second cousin. I wanted the engagement because I knew him well and I liked him. . . . We haven't set a wedding date, but it will not happen until after my second year is completed at the university. That's in the contract too. Actually, neither of us is anxious to marry soon. Because we both agreed as individuals that it's important to complete education before marriage. . . . I definitely plan to work after I complete my education and get married. I hope to be a lawyer and open my own office. That's the second stipulation in the contract. He must allow me to work . . . I will have no more than one or two children—maximum. On that my fiancé and I agree completely. . . . Before the children are in school and while I'm working, I will either put them in a nursery or have one of my relatives look after them.*

—Muna, 18, single (engaged), village resident, "very observant" Muslim, preparing for *tawjihi*

Once the *sahih* is written, and although it constitutes a legal marriage contract, according to customary law (*'urf*), a Muslim girl must remain chaste until the wedding night. There may (or may not) be some highly supervised opportunities for the girl to talk with her husband-to-be during this period. But, although a Muslim girl may say she is engaged, in fact, once the *sahih* is registered in court, she is legally married. Should she wish to terminate the relationship, she has to obtain a divorce, which carries the same negative connotation as does divorce for women at any stage of their married lives—even though she is still a virgin. Because of this, many girls go through with the public party and actual marital commitment, despite having decided in the interim that they do not like the man. In other words, consummating a marriage foreordained to disaster is preferable to breaking a *sahih*—because of family and social problems and because of the social stigma of being a divorced woman. Nardine provides an example of this predicament.

A stranger came to ask for Nardine's hand four months prior to our conversation. Her father had talked with him, then told Nardine about him, and encouraged her to accept him. She stated that she "hated this traditional way" of getting married, "but here in our society it's the only way. It's impossible to have a relationship with a man, to spend two or three months getting to know someone, and then making a decision." She agreed to sit with the suitor and did, but she stated that she didn't feel at all comfortable about agreeing to marry him after one meeting. She did not even particularly like what she saw of him in that encounter. Nevertheless, her father insisted that he was a good man and that she was getting too old to be choosy. (She had declined several prior marriage offers because she wanted to complete her studies.) So

she agreed, the *khutba* was negotiated, and the *sahih* registered—all within one week. Nardine revealed some of her feelings four months later, when we talked.

> *It's been four months since we signed the contract. I'm getting to know this man, but there are many things I don't like about him and don't accept. It isn't easy. There are many problems. I'm trying to deal with them but it's very difficult. I'm living in my family's house so I don't want to discuss my problems with them. I want to do what they want me to do. I have to accept that it was my choice to accept this man even if it was only after one sitting. I cannot blame my father. He didn't force me. But my husband-to-be is extremely controlling and his family is already interfering—even before we are married. Imagine what they will be like after. For example, they are very observant, and they and he are insisting that I wear the jilbaab. I've never even covered my head, I don't believe in these things; I'm not even religious. But they are insisting. And, that's only one problem. But since I've written the marriage contract, if I break it, I'll be a divorced woman and that status is very difficult in this society. Also because of my father's poor health—he has serious heart problems—I'm afraid if I break the contract it would give him such a shock that he might get sick or even die. Plus, if I break the contract there will be a lot of bad talk about me. Society doesn't accept a girl breaking her sahih. Also, this man might talk badly about me. If he is angry enough, he can say anything about me and I'll be ruined forever. I've known two girls to whom this happened. They never married. I guess basically, I'm prepared to accept a marriage that I know will be unbearable rather than face the consequences of breaking the contract.*
>
> —Nardine, 21, engaged, village resident, "not religious" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

### *Marriage*

Marriage is the single most important event in the life of every camp and village woman. West Bank marriages are never simply the union of a man and a woman; they are always family affairs and an integral aspect of the individual's—and the family's— relationship to society. Though marriage and family life are laden with problems, most women eagerly anticipate marriage and some marry at a very young age.[30]

Early marriage is a significant phenomenon among Palestinian camp and village women. According to Jordanian civil law, which applies in the West Bank, the legal age at which a girl (Muslim or Christian) can marry is 15. Within Islam, however, girls are permitted to marry once they reach puberty—that is, have their first menses. Thus, many West Bank girls are married before they are 15. There is no secular authority to enforce the legal age requirement. Some fathers fix their daughters' birth certificates to "prove" that they are older than they actually are, and sometimes Sharia jurists are persuaded to overlook a girl's real age. For purposes of discussion here, I con-

sider early marriage as that of a girl under 18 years of age. PCBS data reveal that, over the past fifty years, the median age of women at first marriage has increased from 16 to 20 in the camps, and from 16 to 19 in the villages.[31] However, during the intifada years, there was a decline in the median age of female first marriage to 18 in both environments. This phenomenon was the result of a number of factors, including parental fears about their daughters' honor if they left the house, prolonged school closures delaying the completion of education, a decrease in the *mahr,* and others.[32] In 1995, among all women age 15 to 19, 20.7 percent had married, and of this group, one-third married before the age of 16, while 82 percent married before age 18.[33] FAFO data for the West Bank obtained during the early 1990s reveal that 37 percent of women married before they reached 17 and 11 percent before the legal age of 15.[34] Though there has been a slight increase in the median age of marriage since the intifada years, early marriage remains common among West Bank camp and village girls.

However old a girl is when she marries, she essentially moves from one controlling family situation to another. Instead of her father's control, she then has to contend with her husband's and her in-laws' control. The vast majority of respondents said they had much more freedom in their natal home than in that of their in-laws. Moreover, regardless of how many responsibilities a girl had in her natal home, her duties and obligations as wife, mother, and daughter-in-law were always described as infinitely greater. Because the women in my research community had never experienced a period of living on their own and making their own decisions, their worldviews tended to be focused exclusively on family concerns. Patriarchy mandates that females be denied the possibility of an independent life experience outside the family confines. The more confined a woman can be kept, the less exposure she has, and the less she is able to think for herself, the less likely she is to challenge her husband's authority and decisions. So, although it is beset with a host of painful problems, the transition from girlhood to wifehood/motherhood is direct and focused. Two women's stories illustrate.

> *My husband is also from the camp and my parents told me he came from a good family. But after we were married and I got to know them, they were just awful. My mother-in law died about a year after we were married and my father-in-law is very old and blind. I respect him. I do everything for him—I bathe him, feed him, whatever he demands. But he screams at me constantly, he uses vulgar language and obscenities—he constantly humiliates me. I cannot leave the house without his permission, and I have to ask him for money for anything I need. I am the only female in the house—besides my husband and father-in-law, there are three brothers-in-law. I do all the cooking, cleaning, everything for all of them.*
>
> —Nada, 17, married (at 15) and pregnant, camp resident, "not very religious" Muslim, completed sixth grade

*My marriage has been very difficult. My husband came as a stranger to ask for my hand. My father said yes, I agreed, and we were married a week later. I knew his mother was dead, but I had no idea of the circumstances into which I was moving. We moved in with my father-in-law and I discovered there were four young girls (my husband's sisters) that I had to care for and raise. I wasn't expecting it. It was extremely difficult; the house was very small, and my father-in-law was very mean and demanding. So I raised my five children and his four sisters. We've had our own independent home for three years now. Our marriage is much better.*

—Islah, 43, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Christian, completed tenth grade

Since many West Bank camp and village women are barely past puberty when they marry, their ignorance about their bodies and their sexuality is thus carried over into married life. This is true even with girls who marry much later. Indeed, regardless of age, women enter marriage in complete ignorance of such fundamental issues. In December 1998, the Palestinian Family Planning Association reported that 90 percent of Palestinian women are uninformed about sex or childbearing issues.[35] My research community validates this study. The overwhelming majority of married respondents, regardless of age, related that they had been told nothing, and knew nothing, about what to expect on their wedding night. They are told, however, that modest women should be indifferent to sex and "never appear to want it." Such admonitions combined with prior lack of interaction with men outside the family—and little with those inside—and with previously socialized concepts concerning the "shame" of their bodies, ensures that new brides will be intensely inhibited. Women's husbands, too, usually knew little more about sex than they did, and most women remember the first night with horror. For the majority, their sexual lives became little better with time. Most said they consider sex a duty or an obligation and comply when requested; some said their husbands simply "take" them when the man "needs" it. A few said they enjoy sex; but only one admitted to initiating sex with her husband. Men too receive little or no meaningful information about sexual relations. While a few camp and village men may have some "experience" via movies, encounters with Israeli girls, or from having lived abroad, "making love" in the sense of a mutually satisfying pleasurable part of married life was rare in my research community. Of course, sharing a house with one's in-laws precludes the possibility of spontaneity or experimentation—or even, one would imagine, experiencing passion. In addition, the fact that the bride and groom are either complete or nearly complete strangers cannot make sexual contact easy—especially for the girl. Moreover, since the very nature of arranged marriage precludes romantic love, marriage and sexual relations must proceed in a context of a bride and groom becoming acquaint-

ed with each other. Following are some of the many similar comments related by my respondents.

*We have had many, many fights and many, many problems over sex. I believe it's my duty and until four years ago I complied with his demands, but I never enjoyed it. I've never liked sex and I think he doesn't like me for this reason—maybe this is the core of the problems in our marriage.*

—Um Aissam, 47, village

*When we first got married he didn't touch me, we didn't have any sexual relations. I thought it was because I wasn't beautiful enough. Later his family talked with him, and now he tries from time to time, but mostly he doesn't like to touch me. I don't know why. He's never forced me, but I've never liked it even when he does it.*

—Nada, 17, camp

*He has been mean to me from day one till now. He beats me too. Not once have we had sex that I wasn't forced—he doesn't know any other way.*

—Um Ayman, 35, camp

*He doesn't force me to sex; he only does it if I agree. But I've never enjoyed it—it's just a duty I must perform like cleaning the house.*

—Saha, 27, village

*I hated sex with him but he wanted it all the time. Worse, because we lived with his family and shared all the facilities in the house, when we did it and I had to take the bath afterward [required by Sharia], everyone in the house knew. I always felt ashamed. There I was at 3:00 a.m. or 3:00 p.m. boiling water and everyone smirking.*

—Um Adel, 53, camp

On the other hand, a few respondents reported enjoying sex.

*Our sexual relationship is very good. I always enjoy it. I think I initiate more than he does.*

—Janeen, 33, village

*Our sex life is very good. In fact, I think it's great.*

—Rina, 34, camp

*Our wedding night was a disaster, but I guess it's like that for all brides. I was scared and shy, and there were so many people around—waiting outside the door. But gradually it became better, and I can honestly say I really enjoy having sex with my husband.*

—Naela, 41, village

The basis of the Muslim marriage contract is legally expressed in the obligation of the male to provide economic maintenance (*nafaqa*) for his wife and the obligation of the female to give her husband obedience (*ta'a*). It is a relationship with built-in asymmetries of rights and duties, justified by the discourse of complementarity and sanctioned by a body of religious law believed to be divinely ordained and not open to challenge. It is an extremely unequal power relation. Yet, it is accepted by a social order that conceptualizes marriage in contractual terms that encourage the husband to command his wife, to be kind to her, but not to "love" her (love being equated with *fitna* or chaos). Moreover, while each spouse is enjoined to be faithful and chaste with regard to the other, Islam provides the male with certain prerogatives that permit him to circumvent this prescription. Such privileges include (1) polygamy; (2) concubinage—the right to contract as many concubines as he can afford—though this practice is quite rare today; and (3) unilateral repudiation—the right to divorce or "exchange" wives at will and without recourse for the female. Moreover, while the male is legally required to provide for his wife's maintenance, there are no shared marital financial or economic resources in Islamic marriage, leaving the wife totally dependent on her husband. Women must ask their husbands for money for everything, including food, clothing, clinic fees, household goods, and personal items. On the other hand, the woman's required obedience ranges from providing sex on demand to not leaving her marital home without her husband's permission. Islamic laws regulating marriage and divorce are among the most potent weapons in the patriarchal arsenal—which is undoubtedly why they have persisted for thirteen centuries with minimal change while other aspects of Sharia have been considerably modified.[36]

In Christian marriage, while males are expected to provide maintenance and females to give obedience, these are implicit in the sacramental vows rather than legally binding contractual stipulations. I observed little difference, however, between Christian women's behavior vis-à-vis their husbands and Muslim women's. Christian girls are socialized with the same norms about their bodies, their honor, and modesty as Muslim girls. They too move directly from the control of their natal family to the control of their husbands and in-laws without any opportunity for independence. Christian wives must ask their husband's permission before leaving the home; they do not share in the family finances; and they must have their husband's approval to work. The norm of women's role being in the home while men are free to go where they want, when they want, with whom they want is the same. (These similarities are detailed in Chapter 5.) Thus, while Islam specifies role obligations for marriage partners, in practice, since Christian norms in West Bank villages are remarkably similar, it must be concluded that these practices endure more because of patriarchy than of religion per se.

### *In-laws: The Matriarchal Mother-in-law*

Upon marriage, a girl is confronted with a whole new existence as a married woman. The first major change is integrating into a new family. A woman typically moves to her husband's natal home and begins her married life in the home of her in-laws. Depending on the personalities involved, this can create confrontational dynamics quite quickly. A new bride is expected to be obedient to her mother-in-law, and as the newest member of the family, she is likely to have the most responsibilities for housework, cooking, and other chores, as well as the least freedom—even to retire to her room by herself. A Muslim girl is under extreme pressure to get pregnant, and if she does not by the end of the first year, she may face divorce.

According to Sharia, female infertility is a legal cause for divorce, and families tend to feel that if a girl does not get pregnant within twelve months, she is unlikely ever to. Thus, mothers encourage sons to quickly divorce to preclude the possibility of the man forming an emotional attachment to his wife and developing a reluctance to divorce her later. It is usually the mothers-in-law who are most concerned about an early pregnancy and who are usually most interested in facilitating the divorce and remarriage of their sons. Jenan's story is typical.

> *My husband always listened to his mother and sister even though I tried to talk with him and explain what was really going on in the house when he was gone. I had a health problem during the first year we were married. My husband was very understanding but his mother and sister created endless problems—I guess they thought I'd never bring children. One day when I came back from the doctor, my sister-in-law and I had a huge fight. She said I was squandering the family's money and she threw me out of the house. Ironically, the doctor had just told me that I was three months pregnant. But by then it didn't matter. His mother and sister wanted me out and in the end he sided with them. Now at 20, I have the stigma of being a divorced woman. I have no education and am completely dependent on my elderly parents. I feel totally destroyed.*
>
> —Jenan, 20, divorced with one son, camp resident, "average" Muslim, completed tenth grade

It is usually the *hama* (mother-in-law), who creates the greatest problems for a newly married couple in all areas. Fatima Mernissi argues that "the close link between mother and son is probably the key factor in the dynamics of Muslim marriage [and] . . . one of the greatest obstacles to conjugal intimacy."[37] Yet, as is demonstrated by the comments of Christian respondents, the relationship between mother and son and the dominance of the mother-in-law is the same among both Christians and Muslims. Thus, I would argue that it is the patriarchal relation between mother and son that impedes closeness. In

addition, the power relationship between the mother-in-law and the wife is one of pure domination and subordination, and in this particular relation, a younger female has less room to maneuver and negotiate than in almost any other. It is worth reiterating here that in patriarchy, the hierarchy is both aged and gendered. Thus, grown sons defer to their mothers—to a greater or lesser extent depending on the strength of character of the mother and of the son—and sons often accede to their mother's demands concerning their wives even when they are in agreement with the wives. Also, during the periods of the day (the majority of time) that the son is out of the house, the mother-in-law can wield her power without restraint. The last thing a man wants to hear is his wife's nighttime complaints about his mother. Moreover, few men are willing or able, in the context of a dispute between his wife and his mother, to take a side. If they do, it is usually with their mother. And, older unmarried sisters living at home can exercise nearly as much power over a wife as the mother—and they will have the backing of the mother.

Officially it is the father's duty to choose a wife for his son, but in practice, if the son does not see a girl he wants, his mother makes the choice. She is the only one who has the opportunity to view prospective brides unveiled. Overwhelmingly camp and village mothers look for young, less educated girls as wives for their sons, because they will be happy to stay at home with the children and will be less likely to challenge the mother-in-law's dominance. Indeed, too much education is considered undesirable because of the threat to a mother-in-law's ability to control her son's wife. Men too prefer to marry very young women—basically for the same reasons. Thus, it is the mother-in-law who is in control from the outset.

Additionally, because the mother-in-law has total control over the household, a new wife is obligated to show her absolute deference. This can take many forms—for example, the more ritual hand kissing and use of the term *amti* (mistress; or in the Nablus region, *khalti*). Or, more concretely, a wife must obtain her mother-in-law's permission to leave the house for any reason, and the mother-in-law usually insists on accompanying her. New wives are typically forced to do all the housework and cooking for the entire family. The young bride must ask her mother-in-law for money for anything she needs. In addition, the mother-in-law often makes it a practice to intrude on any private time or space that the couple may have. Numerous women articulated this complaint in slightly different forms, but Marwa's story is illustrative. A Christian woman, she married (at 20) a middle-class man, though she came from a poor family. It was a traditional marriage; Marwa did not see her husband before they were married.

> *After we married, we moved into my mother-in-law's house. She was a widow and a very successful businesswoman. She sold her tailor-made*

*clothes to urban elite women. I wasn't aware of the class difference until after I moved into her house. The house was elegant and my role was to be the slave. I had to do all the cleaning and cooking for the entire family—besides my husband, myself, and my mother-in-law, there was another brother and his wife. I worked from sunup to sunset scrubbing, cleaning, preparing food. My mother-in-law did all the food shopping; I wasn't allowed to go out of the house unless she or my sister-in-law accompanied me. Everyone gave me orders: "Do this, Marwa; do that, Marwa; get this, get that." My husband and I had a small bedroom to ourselves but every morning his mother made coffee and brought it to him in bed (she never made a cup for me). She sat on his side of the bed chatting with him as if I didn't exist. She dominated me in every way. She made my life miserable for eighteen years. Since then we've had our own independent home and things are a little better, but she is still a controlling force in our lives—especially in his.*

—Marwa, 45, married with three children, village resident, "very religious" Christian, *tawjihi*

In-law problems are manifested in a variety of ways, as the stories below illustrate.

*My mother-in-law makes my life totally miserable. I have one small room with my husband (and soon our baby) in her house. There is another brother plus his wife and two children. We all use the same bathroom and kitchen. My mother-in-law controls everything I do. I cannot visit my relatives let alone friends. She gave me a permission to come to talk with you only because she didn't want to look bad in front of Husseine* [the director of the camp's women's center]. *I've never been allowed to come to the center on any other occasion. And, all the time she is interfering between my husband and me—she can't stand to see us alone together for ten minutes.*

—Kefa', 18, married and pregnant, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eleventh grade

Another Christian woman related:

*We lived in my in-laws' house for nineteen years. It was extremely difficult. It was a small house, and we had only one small room to ourselves where we slept with the children. His mother and sisters didn't like me at all and they treated me very badly. Even though I was the only one employed outside the home, they made me do all the housework, cleaning, and cooking. We've had our own house for one year now and I'm beginning to feel like a human being.*

—Maria, 42, married with two children, village resident, "not observant" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

*The biggest problem in my life has been my mother-in-law. I wanted to finish school when I got married. The headmistress had given her approval, and I started my eleventh year. But my mother-in-law hated that I went to school. She claimed that because of my going to school, I didn't do enough housework. She criticized and harassed me constantly, and she used to tell*

*my husband that if I got too much education, I'd be smarter than him and either control him or leave him. Actually, my husband was supportive, he helped me with the baby when I was studying. But his mother prevailed. One day she gathered all my books and papers and burned them. And that was that. Finally, two years ago we got our own independent home, but she still interferes in every way she can.*

—Rifa, 43, married with five children, village resident, "not very" observant Muslim, completed tenth grade

Most of the women in my research community are living or have lived for long periods in their in-laws' house. Other women have semi-independent homes that are physically attached to their in-laws' house but have separate kitchens and bathrooms. This arrangement, while preferable to the former, does not mean that these women are free of their in-laws' influence. Moreover, the husband usually contributes money to his parents; however, the parents do not control the allocation of all resources. Most of these women appeared to feel that they have some control over their lives and seemed considerably more contented than the women living in their in-laws' house. Not more than a handful of the married women I interviewed were living in genuinely independent situations. These women, typically over 40 and with husbands who usually have relatively stable jobs and reasonable incomes, tend to have a home separate from, but near, their in-laws' home and to maintain a separate budget. They appeared to be the most contented of the married respondents. Fedwa's experience is illustrative.

*I had a lot of problems when I first married because of the change in environment from my family's home to my in-laws.' And that was even more complicated because my husband's mother had died and his father remarried. So I was living with his stepmother. She created many, many problems for us. We lived there for a year, then we rented a small place and moved out. My husband has a special relationship with his grandfather and he gave us some money to build a house on a small piece of his land—my husband's economic situation is very bad. So we built a two-room house but it was very difficult because the toilet was outside, we didn't have a kitchen—I cooked over a propane burner, and we had no place to receive men and women separately. So I gave my husband all the gold he had given me when we married, and we built another two rooms, a kitchen, and an inside toilet. Now I feel so much better. I have my own independent house—it's comfortable and serviceable, there are no in-laws, and we're living on our own. Our marriage is much better too.*

—Fedwa, 27, married with three children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Except for the few women like Fedwa who live in independent houses, in-laws were the major problem and the source of greatest unhappiness in my respondents' lives. All expressed the strong desire to have "my own inde-

pendent home." Indeed, this was the only wish women ever articulated in a personal rather than a relational context. The greater the closeness—one room in the in-laws' house—the greater the misery. But in almost every case, the economic situation made such independence unlikely.[38] A closing thought on in-laws comes from Mernissi: "The triangle of mother, son, and wife is the trump card in the Muslim pack of legal, ideological, and physical barriers that subordinate the wife to the husband and condemn the heterosexual relation to mistrust, violence, and deceit."[39] Again, I would argue, in the "patriarchal pack," Christian women suffer as much as Muslim women.

### *Children*

In addition to dealing with her in-laws, a newly married woman must be concerned about getting pregnant as quickly as possible. In both the Christian and Muslim communities, there is overwhelming pressure for a woman to prove that she is able to bear children. For Muslim women, as noted, the pressure to become pregnant is especially intense. In addition, women in the rural West Bank are expected to have many children. A large family tends to give a woman, and in turn her husband's family, status in the community and may facilitate better relations with her mother-in-law. There is also strong societal approval—and pressure—for large families. For example, a couple that decided on and planned to have only two children would face enormous pressure from their families and from society to have more.

Recent PCBS data on women's stated preferences concerning desired number of children demonstrate that 63 percent of West Bank women consider four to six children "ideal." Among village women, 27 percent stated that having six children was ideal, as did 32 percent of camp women.[40] While similar data on male attitudes was not collected by the PCBS, the majority of my respondents indicated that their husbands wanted "as many children as God gives us."

> *One of the biggest problems women face in this society is too many children. Husbands force wives to have too many kids. It's not the woman's choice; it's the husband's. And here a woman really has no choice. If she even tries to discuss the issue with her husband, it will create too many problems. If a woman says I don't want to have any more children, the husband will say to her: "Why do you think I married you." So there will be huge problems and he might divorce her. I know, I've been through this with my husband. He still wants more children.*
>
> —Um Ibrahim, 31, married with six children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed seventh grade

Birth control is available and relatively inexpensive in a number of clinics throughout the West Bank, although access remains a serious problem,

especially for rural women. Studies indicate that 99 percent of all married women are aware of birth control methods. Islam does not specifically prohibit it while Christianity does, but culturally, especially among camp and village men, it is not considered acceptable. In 1997, the PCBS reported that 34 percent of all married women were using a modern method of birth control.[41] My respondents—if they used it at all—reported using it to space children rather than to prevent children, and most said they preferred breast-feeding to "artificial" methods. Among those who reported using a modern technique, the IUD was by far preferred to the pill, which must be consciously taken on a daily basis to be effective and which can cause hormonal changes with which women said they were uncomfortable.[42] None of my respondents' husbands used, or were willing to consider using, condoms. Most stated their husbands did not approve of their using birth control, and many of those who were using it were doing so surreptitiously.

### *Divorce and Child Guardianship*

In the Christian community, once a couple is married there is no possibility whatsoever of divorce. Christianity considers marriage an immutable sacrament. According to Christian women, this situation is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they do not live in fear of being summarily divorced if they displease their husbands or do not bear sons. Thus, they have a sense of psychological security that Muslim women never have. On the other hand, no matter how dreadful a marriage, they are condemned to remain married. In extreme cases, the church patriarch may allow a separation, which merely means separate living arrangements of some sort, but the marriage itself cannot be dissolved. Thus, the partners can never remarry and have new lives. Several women's comments illustrate.

> *There are terrible problems with marriage in the Christian community. Sometimes you find a husband and wife sleeping in different rooms in the same house. Though we don't have divorce, there is a great deal of separation here. There are many extremely miserable marriages in this community.*
>
> —Rima, 30, married with four children, village resident, "observant" Christian, *tawjihi*

> *In Christianity we don't have divorce so there are no divorced women. But we have separated couples—they can't live together, they can't divorce. So they separate. My sister-in-law is one of these—it's a terrible situation. It's much worse than divorce. At least divorced people can remarry. Separated people must live their lives alone.*
>
> —Fathiyya, 47, married with seven children, village resident, "observant" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

*My daughter isn't happy in her marriage but I will never agree to her divorcing. It's against religion, it isn't done. I'll help her in any way I can—financially, emotionally, but I won't let her divorce. I would rather see her unhappy than divorced. As a Christian, I don't accept divorce. I must prevent it.*

—Suad, 43, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Christian, *tawjihi*

Taneea's story brings home the tragedy of this proscription, although the specifics of her situation are quite extraordinary. Taneea married at 18 to a non-kin man and moved to his village. She has been employed for fifteen years as a cleaning woman at a local school. Her meager salary, when she has had control over it, is insufficient to meet the basic needs of her family. Her husband is a life-long criminal and is presently serving a life sentence for murder (nonpolitical).

*I cannot remember one good day in this marriage. It has been a disaster from the beginning. After six months I knew he was a very bad man. He was extremely violent—he beat me and kicked me, and slapped me and punched me. I went home to my parents more times than I can remember, but they were poor and always encouraged me to return to my husband. Every time I returned, he raped me and I got pregnant.*

—Taneea, 44, married with seven children, village resident, "very observant" Christian, completed eighth grade

Taneea's husband took all the money she earned and gave her nothing, embezzled money from others, dealt in drugs, and was arrested (and convicted) countless times. After her third child, she went to the Roman Catholic patriarch and asked for a divorce. He told her to go back to her husband and be a "better servant," although Taneea claims the patriarch knew of her husband's personal behavior and criminal activity. After the fourth child, she went to the village *mukhtar* and asked him to intervene, but since she was not originally from that village, and her husband was, the village elders did nothing. "My parents, my sisters and brothers, my neighbors and friends as well as the Church, all knowing my situation full well, constantly counseled me to be patient, give him time to mature, and try to make the marriage work." And so she did. But when he was convicted of murder, she again went to the church to ask for a divorce. The patriarch admonished her to remember her marriage vows: "for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, till death do you part," but said he would consider the case. That was two years ago. Now she fears, among other things, that her husband's family will take her children. Christian children, like Muslim children, are considered property of the patriline.

In Islam, both men and women have a legal right to divorce, although it is far easier for a man to divorce his wife than the reverse. Moreover, divorced men bear no social disapprobation, whereas a divorced woman carries significant social shame. There are almost no long-term statistics on divorce rates available to a Western researcher. However, for the year 1997, data were made available to the Palestinian press by the Islamic Sharia court. The following figures combine both the West Bank and the Gaza Strip; the court did not distinguish between the two areas. In 1997, there were 12,599 marriage contracts and 3,098 divorces recorded. This suggests that in 1997, for every four marriages, there was one divorce.[43] A much earlier study pertaining only to the West Bank reported that in 1965, there were 304 divorces.[44] I will not attempt to construct an analysis from so little information.

In Islamic Sharia, there are three types of divorce: *talaq*—a unilateral act by the husband (outside the jurisdiction of the court); *khula*—a mutual agreement between husband and wife wherein the woman forfeits all her economic entitlements (also not involving the court); and *tafriq*—a judicial order of divorce by a Sharia judge. Unilateral repudiation by a man merely requires his declaration, three times, "I divorce you." If such a declaration is stated three times in one setting, the divorce is immediately irrevocable; however, if there is time between the pronouncements, the man may change his mind until after the third pronouncement, when the divorce becomes irrevocable. After the third pronouncement, he can remarry his former wife only after she marries, consummates the marriage, and divorces another man.[45]

After the third pronouncement, a woman must wait three menstrual cycles (the *iddat* period) before she can remarry—to ensure that she is not pregnant. If she is, the child belongs to the father but the divorce stands. The husband is expected to provide the woman maintenance (*nafaqa*) until the end of the *iddat* period and to pay the deferred dower at that time, after which he has no legal financial responsibility for the divorced wife.[46]

A man can repudiate his wife for any reason, although, according to Jordanian law, the wife has the right to demand compensation for "arbitrary" divorce.[47] If a Sharia judge determines that a husband's decision was arbitrary—an extremely uncommon ruling in practice—the husband may be required to pay maintenance to his ex-wife for one year. By law, women are entitled to receive their deferred dower at the time of a divorce; however, most women do not receive it automatically. Many men simply refuse to pay, while others do not have the financial ability to do so. In either situation, the woman is left economically destitute. Mernissi argues, and I agree, that *talaq* is merely "the unconditional right of the male to break the marriage bond without any justification . . . [designed to] prevent the male from losing his sexual appetite through boredom. It aims at ensuring a supply of new sexual objects, within

the framework of marriage, to protect him against the temptation of *zina* (adultery)."[48]

In the past two decades, women have been increasingly going to court to demand the deferred dower, but men can bargain in court over this financial obligation, and frequently women receive much less than what they are contractually entitled to. If a man does not have sufficient money to pay the deferred dower at the time of the divorce, a judge may rule that he pay it over time in installments. Even so, it often happens that men do not pay either the deferred dower or the stipulated maintenance, and women have very little recourse. Annelies Moors reports that "the divorce registers, the summaries of cases and women's stories about divorce indicate that women commonly do not receive their deferred dower."[49] Moreover, while Sharia courts adjudicate cases, they do not punish offenders—punishment is the responsibility of the state government. Thus, Palestinian women suffer additionally because even if a judge rules in their favor, there is no Palestinian government to ensure the husband's compliance. The PA has control over only a small portion of the West Bank. Since it has been working to strengthen *hamayel,* it has no interest in interfering in family affairs. Moreover, as a thoroughly patriarchal authority, it has no concern for the welfare of women.

There are two ways women can initiate divorce. The first is *khula,* which can take place only when the husband agrees. Typically, a woman asks for an irrevocable repudiation from her husband in exchange for her agreement to a specific financial arrangement—most commonly, her renunciation of claim to her deferred dower and to any maintenance.[50] The second avenue for a woman to seek a divorce is *tafriq*—a court order. In this case, if a woman wants a divorce without her husband's consent, and without having to give up her rights, she must have a legally valid reason and must go to court to dissolve the marriage. Theoretically, according to Sharia, there are five legally sanctioned reasons to grant a *tafriq.* They include injury or discord; a defect (incapacity to procreate) on the part of the husband; failure to pay maintenance; unexcused absence for a year or more without contacting his wife; and a prison sentence of three or more years.[51] In practice, however, courts typically grant such writs only if a husband has been away for more than a year without in any way contacting the wife, or if he has been in prison for more than three years.[52] In both *khula* and *tafriq,* the woman must observe the *iddat* period. If she is pregnant, the child becomes the property of the father or of his family.

In December 1998, a Gazan woman from the prominent al-Sarraj family sought a *tafriq* in Sharia court from her wealthy husband of twenty-five years. They have four grown children and numerous grandchildren. Her husband, opposing her desire for a divorce, contested the case, arguing that since her commitment in the marriage contract was obedience to him, the court should

enforce his legal entitlement to her subordination and force her to return to his house—after which, he claimed, there would be a reconciliation. The wife lost the case in court, whereupon the judge ordered her to return immediately and obediently to her husband's house. She refused the verdict and abandoned the court before the judge's decision could be enforced.[53] She took her case to the public explicitly to illustrate the discrimination against women in Islamic personal status laws and to attempt to mobilize public support to pressure the Legislative Council to pass laws more equitable to women's interests.

Under all circumstances of divorce, a mother can continue to function as her children's guardian only for a limited period, after which they automatically come under the father's guardianship. Usually, custody is granted to the mother until boys are nine and girls eleven; however, in some cases both may be permitted to remain with the mother until they reach puberty. If a woman remarries, she immediately loses custody of her children. The whole system of child custody is designed to ensure that the children remain within the patriline. Children are their father's property; their mother is merely a caretaker. Once the children are taken from the mother at the legally specified age (or when she remarries), she is given little, if any, opportunity to see them again. Moreover, even while the children are with their mother, the father has ultimate legal authority. He can commit them to marriage, decide about their schooling, and so on.[54] Rula's story illustrates this.

Rula, 17, lives in a camp with her paternal grandmother and a maiden aunt. She is a victim of her parents' divorce. She dropped out of school after the ninth grade, is a "not observant" Muslim, and spends her time "just staying at home." Her father divorced her mother three years ago. He works as a day laborer in Israel.

> *I was 14 when they divorced. I don't know why my father divorced her, they were first cousins. I haven't seen her since the divorce and I don't know if I ever will. She's living in Egypt now because her brothers forced her to remarry. They said having a divorced woman in the family brought shame to the whole family so they arranged a marriage for her with an Egyptian man she'd never seen. I guess they wanted her as far away as possible. I don't exchange phone calls or letters with my mother but I really miss her; we were very close. I like my aunt and my grandi, but it's not the same as with my mother. I rarely see my father; he just comes home to eat and he doesn't talk much.*

A divorced woman in West Bank camp and village society has little choice but to take her children (assuming the children are young), and return to her father's home. Since most families are quite impoverished, the added burden of a daughter and her young children may be too much to bear. In such cases the woman's family usually encourages her to remarry as soon as possible so she will have a husband to take care of her, and the children can go to

their father's care. Women who remain in their parents' home find themselves as secluded, cloistered, and under as much surveillance as they were during puberty. It is feared that a woman who has experienced sex is even more dangerous to the social order—because of her *qaid* power causing *fitna*—than a virgin. Many young divorced women remarry fairly easily—in part, because since they are not virgins and are somewhat older than the preferred age, the *mahr* will be lower, making it easier for a man with scarce financial resources to marry. Additionally, since the man has no responsibilities for his new wife's children, marrying a divorcée does not involve problems with stepchildren.

Divorced women who choose not to remarry, or who are too old to be marriageable, have a particularly difficult time. Because most such women do not have the education or skills to find a decent job to support themselves, they end up working in factories and must cope with society's double disdain for divorced women and for women who work in factories. The strength of the social stigma associated with divorced women in Palestine is illustrated in Maha's story, which was reported in the Palestinian press. She is a young West Bank camp woman who discovered, during the intifada, that her husband was a collaborator (a Palestinian traitor serving Israel). Though she had two small children, she felt she could not continue living with such a man (who was also violently abusive). She decided to ask for a *tafriq,* but when she told her family, her parents responded with horror and told her, "I'd rather my daughter was married to a collaborator than be divorced." She went to court in spite of her parents and after two years was given a divorce and custody of her children (until the legal age when they must go to their father). However, the court refused to award her maintenance or her deferred dower. She now has a full-time job, supports her children, and states that she is happy to be divorced from her abusive, collaborator husband. Still, she says, being a divorced woman in Palestine is very difficult. "I feel as if I'm under constant scrutiny. I can't go out alone in the evenings unless it's with my parents or brothers. It is as if people watch me to see if I make a mistake so they can criticize me."[55]

Jama's story of marriage and divorce was one of the most painful I heard. She is divorced, works in a factory, and lives with and financially and physically supports her infirm, aging parents. Her father arranged the marriage of Jama to her cousin with his brother, who was living in Amman, Jordan, at the time. Jama had never seen her cousin/husband-to-be until her father took her to Jordan for the wedding. On her wedding night, Jama's husband beat and raped her. The next day she pleaded with her father to take her back to their home. Her father replied:

> *Absolutely not. If you divorce this man after one night, people will start speaking badly about you. They will say it was your fault, that you weren't a*

*virgin. It will be shameful. The whole family will be shamed and none of your sisters will be able to marry. You will stay.*

She stayed and the beatings continued. Once he put a finger through her eye and she has had no sight in the eye since. Jama related that her husband had "some psychological problems" as a consequence of a learning disability and that, as the only son, the family pampered and supported him in everything. She said they encouraged his violence against her because they wanted to "make a man out of him." After her father's initial rebuke, Jama spoke to no one about her suffering until during her third pregnancy when her brother came to visit. He was en route home to their village in the West Bank, after completing his studies in Russia, and discovered Jama battered, bruised, half-blind, and severely malnourished. He insisted that she come home with him, and with his support she gathered her two young children and returned to her father's house. Her father was very angry and strongly pressured her to return to her husband, but her brother supported her. With his backing, Jama filed for *tafriq,* but although the court granted the divorce, the judged imposed an arbitrary *khula* settlement. She was denied any maintenance or her deferred dower, plus she had to return the gold from the prompt dower. Her father and brother could not afford to support her two young children, so when her husband's father (her uncle) petitioned the court for the children, her father did not object and the court gave the children to the husband. When her third child was born, the court also gave the baby to the father. Now her ex-husband has remarried, moved back to Jama's village, and she is permitted to see the children once a month. Except to go to work, she does not leave her family's house—partly because she has so many responsibilities taking care of her parents and partly because she cannot face the village gossip. At 27, Jama is wan, frail, and looks 40. With a deep sigh of resignation she concluded her story: "This is my fate. I have to accept it. What else can I do."

Azia, married at 17, is 20 and divorced with one son. Her former husband remarried two years ago and his new wife is pregnant. Azia lives with her natal family in a refugee camp; she is educated through the tenth grade and describes herself as an "average" Muslim. Since her husband claimed he did not have the money to give Azia her deferred dower (although he had money to pay the costs of a new wife), the court ordered him to pay her $50 per month until the amount was paid in full. Nevertheless, he only rarely makes the payment.

*I was too young to marry. I was only 17. I am destroyed. This marriage destroyed my life. Now I have the responsibility of my son and the stigma of being a divorcée. . . . I don't know if I would ever marry again. Now there is a man asking for my hand, but if I marry him I will lose my son. How can I*

*choose between the happiness of my son and my personal happiness? Probably I will stay with my parents and my son—till I have to give him to his father.*

Altaf married at 14 and divorced at 18, with no children. She has six years of education, lives with her natal family in a camp, and describes herself as a "very observant" Muslim. She is 19 now. Altaf was married to a maternal first cousin and after four years of marriage remained a virgin. Initially, she told no one about her husband's sexual impotence, but as pressure mounted on her to get pregnant, and in the context of his continuous beatings and verbal humiliation, she finally told her father. He took her to a doctor to ascertain the validity of her claim, then took her to court to sue for *tafriq.* The court awarded her a divorce and her deferred dower but no maintenance. Altaf's ex-husband's mother (who had instigated the union) wants Altaf to return to her son (who, according to Altaf, did not want the marriage in the first place). In connivance with Altaf's mother (her sister), the mother-in-law has withheld payment of the deferred dower as a means to get Altaf to return. Altaf says that she will never go back and that, moreover, she is in love with her next door neighbor with whom she grew up. He, however, is Afro-Palestinian.

*The work of people is to gossip about people. People gossip about me and about my divorce all the time. But I don't care—I don't care what society says. But in the situation that I am a divorced white woman in love with a black man, if I were to marry him, society would be doubly hard on me. They'll say that I only married him—a black—because I'm a divorcee and can't get a good white man. My mother will be outraged and people will talk a lot. I will be affected by society in this case because I'm both divorced and married to a black. I don't know what will happen. I don't know if I'm strong enough to stand up to my family and society.*

Um Muriad is 35 and married to her second husband, with whom she has six children. She first married at 17 and divorced at 20. The court gave the daughter of that marriage to the father. Um Muriad lives in a camp, has nine years of education, and is a "very observant" Muslim. She related that she and her first husband had lived happily while they were together, until he began to travel. After a trip to America, he decided he would go there—one way or another. Subsequently he met a divorcée who had a green card, so he divorced Um Muriad and married her. She was distressed by the divorce but devastated by the loss of her baby daughter.

*I was cheated by the Sharia lawyer. He told me I should just allow my husband to see the child, but the moment he got his hands on her, he kidnapped her and took her to America. Now he's back, living here in the camp with a third wife, and I am only allowed to visit my daughter, in his house, for one hour, once a month.*

Divorce in West Bank camp and village society is clearly a calamitous event for a woman. She loses her children, is expelled from her home, receives little, if any, economic maintenance, and faces severe social disapprobation. Polygamy too is intolerable for Muslim women, although in a polygamous situation the husband is responsible—at least theoretically—for the economic maintenance of each wife and her children. A woman continues to raise her children and she remains in her home—however psychologically uncomfortable it may be. She is not socially stigmatized regardless of how badly she feels internally.

## OTHER FAMILY SITUATIONS

### *Polygamy*

Polygamous unions are among the most difficult problems encountered by Muslim women. In Sharia, a man has the right to take up to four wives at the same time and he need not inform an existing wife (or wives) of his intention. There are certain stipulations in Sharia concerning the circumstances under which a man may take more than one wife but in practice, men take second (and third and fourth) wives on any whim. The most common reason for marrying an additional wife is the desire for more sons; the first wife either has not borne a son or not had enough sons. In cases of extreme marital discord, a man may prefer a second wife to divorce either because his first wife is a paternal first cousin or because he cannot afford to divorce. One Palestinian observer of polygamy and its consequences, Fadel Abu-Hayn, professor of mental health at the College of Education in Gaza and director of the Center for Social Training and Crisis Administration, comments that men take multiple wives for reasons of power, prestige, pleasure, and revenge.

> The increase in children [resulting from polygamy], especially sons, is an increase in power and pride and a source of boasting between families. . . . [Moreover] since marriage merely satisfies biological and security needs . . . the mentality of many men regarding marriage is that it is for pleasure and possession. . . . [Also, because marriages are not based on affection], this naturally leads to a lukewarm relationship between the two. If the man wants to take revenge on his wife for their unhappy relationship, he marries another woman.[56]

The major effect on women of this legal option for men is its inherent threat hanging over their heads and producing a continuous sense of insecurity and a compulsion to be exemplar wives in every sense. Obedience becomes comprehensible in this context.

Polygamous situations are equally difficult for the children in them. Because the emotions of children are so closely linked to their mothers, the psychological and emotional pain of the mothers, combined with the general family tensions, deeply affect the children. For example, the children of the wife who is not the husband's favorite will experience the same sense of rejection, and emotional and material deprivation, as she will. One young woman from a Palestinian refugee camp whose father is married to three wives commented:

> *Sometimes my father doesn't remember all of his children since he has so many. Sometimes he doesn't even know that the child standing in front of him is his own. . . . At school I feel very inferior and insecure when my classmates find out that my father is married to more than one woman. I feel ashamed.*[57]

According to research data, polygamy has declined considerably over the past fifty years. The PCBS relates that of all the married unions in Palestine in 1995, only 3.6 percent were polygamous.[58] That statistic seems low considering the relatively high number of incidents I encountered among my research community. But, since the above figure relates to all Palestine (Gaza plus the urban areas), it can be inferred that it is likely to be highest in the camps and villages. Another researcher estimates that the rate of polygamy is between 5 and 10 percent in the villages.[59] Nevertheless, I was unable to generate independent data to support my observations.

However, the general decline in polygamy is evidenced in the fact that only 7 out of 150 (excluding the 25 Christian women) of my respondents are in polygamous unions—none involving three wives—while 13 have/had fathers with two or more wives. One reason for the decline is economic. Given the extent of poverty and unemployment in West Bank camps and villages, a second wife and additional children are a luxury few men can afford. Moreover, if, as is usually the case, the women hate each other and the domestic scene becomes intolerable, fewer still have the resources to construct separate living quarters for each family.

Not a single wife or daughter among my respondents who had lived in a polygamous situation had experienced anything other than misery. Several women's stories will illustrate. Maliki is 63. She grew up with her father (who was a teacher), her mother, her siblings, two additional wives of her father, and their children—twenty people—in one small home. As is common, her father favored his last wife and treated his first wife—Maliki's mother—with extreme prejudice. He gave all the money he earned to the second and third wives, and Maliki's mother had to take in sewing to feed and clothe her children. Maliki told me that her mother's humiliating rejection and impoverishment were

*the major factors in my drive to get an education. I never wanted to be in a position like my mother. So, I was always the first one in my class—from grade one till* tawjihi. *But we were so poor I never even had a school bag for my books.*

When Maliki finished the ninth grade, she took a matriculation examination that allowed her to become a teacher (no longer possible). She began teaching and saving money while she studied for the *tawjihi,* although she could not save all her earnings because she had to help her mother with her younger sisters. She elected to take the Egyptian *tawjihi* rather than the Jordanian examination because she wanted to study science at an Egyptian university. She received the highest marks of all the students taking the exam that year and was accepted at university. However, her father refused to pay any part of the cost of her studying in Egypt, and she was unable to save enough on her own to afford it by herself. Deeply disappointed, she took a two-year diploma in science at a West Bank college and became a teacher. She later was appointed headmistress at a village girls' secondary school and founded and directed a village women's center; also, she married and raised five children. But, despite her accomplishments and the passage of time, Maliki describes her experience with polygamy with an intensity and immediacy that makes one feel as though it happened yesterday.

Unlike Maliki, other respondents were unable to overcome the devastation, rejection, and despair associated with their experience of polygamy. Widad is 39, a camp resident, educated through the sixth grade, and a "very observant" Muslim. She has been married for twenty years to a paternal first cousin with whom she has three sons and three daughters. Two months before I talked with her, Widad's husband had married a second woman and brought her to live in Widad's home. Devastated, she returned to her father's home (where we talked), although she has not been able to stay there continuously—her children require her attention at home and her father cannot afford to support her. Sobbing, she related how the new wife, 33, just settled in and took her husband's affections away from her. He has not slept with Widad since the wedding. "How could he just abandon me? How could he bring another wife to my home? I feel like my world has been turned upside down. I feel I'm not human." When I inquired about her plans, she replied:

*What can I do? I have no education, I couldn't find work. And, I don't want to lose my children. If I divorce him, he has the right to take the children. I live for my children, I couldn't survive without them, and they couldn't survive without me—they will never accept this new wife, for sure they won't. What to do? I will go back and accept it. I don't have any other choice. This is my fate.*

Um Kamal and Um Moshen, co-wives in a village, are married to an unusually unscrupulous man. The husband married Um Kamal first; then within three years, and despite the fact that she had two children and was pregnant with a third, he married Um Moshen, whom he courted on the basis of being a divorced man. After a quarrel with her husband, Um Kamal went to her parents' home, where she delivered her third child. While she was away, her husband married Um Moshen and brought her to the house. When Um Kamal returned, she found the second wife settled into her bedroom. At the same time, Um Moshen discovered that her new husband was not divorced. Both women (separately—they do not speak to each other) described their lives as a continual horror. He beats them; he arbitrarily sleeps with—"rapes"—one or the other, depending on his whim; he is verbally abusive; and he has stolen the gold he gave each of them as dower to use for his personal pleasure. Um Kamal has three sons and three daughters; Um Moshen has four sons and four daughters. In spite of the utter misery of each, neither would consider divorcing this man because, like Widad, they have little education, no employment possibilities, and cannot face the prospect of losing their children. Um Kamal stated:

> *I believe that my situation is totally unique in Palestinian society. I don't think there are any other women suffering the way I'm suffering. I'm the only woman whose husband married another woman without any reason—except to hurt me.*
>
> —Um Kamal, 37, married with six children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed tenth grade

Um Moshen stated:

> *I feel that I am a complete failure as a human being. My marriage is a failure—it was a failure from the beginning. I haven't achieved anything in life except bringing my children.*
>
> —Um Moshen, 35, married with eight children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eleventh grade

Mernissi comments that polygamy "entitles the male not simply to satisfy his sexuality, but to indulge it to saturation without taking women's needs into consideration, women being considered simply agents in the process."[60] On the other hand, Nira Yuval-Davis suggests that in a society where women are not allowed to live on their own and divorce is so easy for men, the continued existence of polygamy might be a reasonable option for older women, who at least do not lose their homes, social status, and economic support.[61]

### *Widowhood*

Widows in West Bank camp and village society face far less social stigma than divorcées, but they too must relinquish their children to their husband's family at the legally determined age and they are expected to return to their paternal family's home immediately on the husband's death. Like divorcées, their lives—if they are premenopausal and especially if they are younger—become secluded, cloistered, and subject to constant vigilance. Both Christian and Muslim widows are legally permitted to remarry, although they forfeit their children to their husband's family if they do so. A widow is, by law, entitled to a portion of her husband's estate. By law, she is also to be paid her deferred dower before the estate is divided. Yet, just as most West Bank camp and village women decline their share of inheritance when their father dies (discussed in Chapter 5), so most widows decline their deferred dower. Especially if a woman has at least one son, she usually renounces her right to the deferred dower and allows her children to inherit the whole estate. On the other hand, a widow would not hesitate to claim her deferred dower if her late husband's agnates were contending heirs (which would be the case if he did not have sons), or if there were children of other wives who would share in the estate. The number of widows claiming their deferred dowers has declined over time from one-third before 1967 to about one-quarter in the mid-1980s.[62]

The disinclination of widows with sons to claim their deferred dowers, like the disinclination of daughters to accept inheritance from their fathers, is part and parcel of the nature of patriarchal kinship relationality. A woman's decision to leave all the money to her sons, in turn reaffirms and strengthens her ties to them and their obligations to her. A son's responsibility to support—financially and emotionally—his mother would be lessened, perhaps negated, if the mother had claimed part of the inheritance. On the other hand, by making herself financially dependent on her sons at their father's death, she intensifies and solidifies her claims to their future support.

Um Bahjat's story is typical. She is 40, a village resident, has three years of education, and is a "very observant" Muslim. She was first married at 15 and had two children, who were taken by her husband's family. She is remarried, as a second wife, and has six children by her second husband.

> *When my first husband died, his family told me to leave their house and go back to my parents. But they kept my children. I have only been allowed to see them once a year although they only live a few kilometers from here. I wasn't even invited to my daughter's wedding. Both my children are angry at me for "abandoning" them and "allowing" their grandparents to raise them. They don't understand that I had no choice—legally, socially, or financially.*

Ilham's story, from the perspective of a child, illustrates how the death of a father sunders children from their mothers. Her mother did not remarry until after she lost all her children to her deceased husband's family. Ilham is 17, single, and a camp resident. She dropped out of school after tenth grade, "isn't doing much," and describes herself as an "average" Muslim. Her father died when she was five months old, her three older sisters are married, and she lives with her paternal grandmother. She lived with her mother until she was nine, then her late father's family claimed her, and the court ordered that she be given to the grandmother. After Ilham's mother lost her last daughter—Ilham—(to the paternal grandmother), the mother remarried and moved from the camp to a village inside the Green Line. Ilham is extremely angry with her mother.

> *When my mother got remarried it was as if the world came crashing down around me. I felt totally severed from her, totally abandoned. My relationship with her is okay, I don't see her very often—every couple of months or so, but I'm still angry with her. She had the right to remarry, she raised us all until we were nine and my grandmother took us to her house, but she was always close—we lived just next door. Now she's so far away. My grandmother is okay with me, but I need my mother, I need her mothering, I need her beside me.*

### *Never-Married Women*

According to PCBS statistics released in 1995, among all women age 35 to 65, only 9.25 percent had never been married.[63] Among my 175 respondents, nine were 35 years of age or older and never married. At 5.14 percent, this is a somewhat smaller group than the national average. All single respondents were employed, and all expressed far more contentment and satisfaction with their lives than any of the married women I interviewed. All are physically attractive women without severe handicaps, although one had a slight limp. All, except the respondent with the limp, stated that they had had opportunities to marry when they were young but had chosen not to marry. Interacting with them, I had no reason to doubt their stories. All are Muslim. Two have four-year university degrees; six have *tawjihi* plus two-year diplomas; one has the nine-year Jordanian matriculation certificate plus three years of vocational education. Six are from camps and three from villages. In a society where marriage and children are held up as a woman's *raison d'être,* these nine individuals stand out as extraordinary.

It is unheard of, in my research community, for a single woman—of any age—to live on her own. All the unmarried respondents lived either with their parents or, if their parents were deceased, with a married brother and his family. Across age, class, educational level, marital status, religious affiliation,

and occupational categories, all respondents believe that it is wrong—*haram, eib*—for a woman to live apart from her family. Even those in their forties and fifties stated that they did not want to live on their own, thought it would be shameful to do so, and had never considered it. Conversely, one of my translators owned an apartment and lived by herself in Ramallah. Yet, she was so conscious of the negative connotation of her situation that, when asked where she lived, she said her family home in her village of origin (which she had left ten years earlier). My second translator, though in her mid-thirties, lived with her family in a remote village in the northern region of the West Bank and commuted 60 miles each way, each day, to work with me. She told me that it would be unacceptable in her village, even if her parents allowed it, for her to take an apartment by herself to be nearer her work.

Lubna is 47, living with her parents in a village, and employed as the head of a women's center. She has *tawjihi* plus a two-year diploma, previously worked as a teacher, and is a "very observant" Muslim. She related:

> *Many men came to ask for my hand when I was young but I didn't like any of them, and my father never pushed me. He always said it was entirely my decision. He didn't worry about my honor; he's a deeply religious man and he always said: "Plant an apple, get an apple." I have six sisters and they are all married and living in their own independent homes, but I wouldn't exchange places with any of them. I'm quite happy as a single woman. I'm free to do as I want; I don't have the responsibilities of a family; and especially I don't have to raise children. That is something I really never wanted to do. Raising children is very hard. Now I have the freedom to travel and to go where I want. I made the umra* [a mini-*hajj*] *with a female cousin—no males accompanied us.*

Zahra, at 35, is considerably younger than Lubna, but even more enthusiastic about her life. She lives with her parents in a camp; she is a teacher and a Muslim Sister. She has four married sisters and stated:

> *Many men have asked for my hand; till now they come and ask. But I always say no. I don't want to get married because I don't think any man will tolerate my way of life—my independence—and I am not about to give it up. I work, I participate in many activities, I travel wherever I want to go, and I don't want to give up these things. For example, one evening at 5:00 p.m., the director of the Center told me I had to be in Ramallah by 8:00 the next morning, and from there go to Amman for a conference on the disabled. I went home, got my passport, and was there on time. Do you think any husband would tolerate such independence? My father has never tried to force me to marry—he always encouraged me to get my education and to work. My mother often says, "I want to see you married before I die." I tell her, "Long life, mother!" My family is very conservative and very religious, but they have always supported me in everything I've wanted to do. I have*

*always even been permitted to mix with men. They gave me morals and character, and they have always trusted me to do what is right. For me, my work and my freedom are much more important than family life, and my religion gives me the strength to follow the path I've chosen.*

Ferial is 47, lives with a brother and his family in a camp, is an "observant" Muslim with *tawjihi* plus a two-year diploma. She has been involved in politics all her life, including several imprisonments for her activism. Now she works in a PA ministry. Her mother died when she was a teenager, and her father's influence was an important aspect of her formative years.

*In our home there was never any discrimination between males and females. My father always insisted on democracy and equality. I never married because I didn't want to. And my father never pressured me although many men came for my hand when I was young. Actually, marriage was never important to me. When I was young I was focused on getting my education; then when I became involved in politics, the political struggle was all important. Once, I felt myself becoming attracted to one of my comrades, but I stopped and used my head instead of following my heart. It would have set a very bad example if we had had a relationship or gotten married—the object of being in politics is to make politics, not to find an opportunity for meeting mates. I also knew that I would lose my authority and independence in the movement if I became someone's wife. And I didn't want that. I also didn't want to be controlled by anyone; I always wanted to be independent. I have never, not for a moment, regretted this decision. My life has always been very full, rewarding, and self-fulfilling in ways that marriage and a family could never have been.*

It is difficult to draw a particular conclusion from these anecdotal stories. But they do suggest that the system is not as rigid, unchanging, and unchangeable as much of the foregoing in this chapter may imply. Some women do find their own space and determine their own life choices.

## CONCLUSION

The family is the most important social institution in the lives of West Bank camp and village women. Familial patriarchy, with its rigid aged and gendered hierarchies, its discourse of honor and shame, its relations of domination and subordination, and its myriad punishments, controls women's bodies, minds, and behaviors—their entire lives. In the next chapter my respondents articulate what they consider their rights, the fact that they do not realize these rights (hence the concept of "rights not taken"), and the means they consider as the

most efficacious to change their situations. Chapter 5 thus clarifies, in the most concrete manner, the nature and meaning of patriarchal kinship relationality.

## NOTES

1. Suad Joseph, *Gender and Family in the Arab World* (Washington DC: Middle East Research and Information Project), 1994.

2. Hillel Frisch, "Modern Absolutist or Neopatriarchal State Building? Customary Law, Extended Families, and the Palestine Authority," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (1997): 341–358; Rita Giacaman, Islah Jad, and Penny Johnson, "For the Public Good? Gender and Social Policy in Palestine: The PLO's National Plan for Social Welfare," in *Gender and Public Policy,* Gender and Society: Working Paper No. 2 (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, 1995), pp. 7–18.

3. Joseph, *Gender and the Family in the Arab World.* Also, for an excellent discussion of recent transformations in the Arab family, see Halim Barakat, "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation," in Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, ed., *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), pp. 27–48.

4. Iyad Sarraj, "Whispers of the Scared," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), October 16, 1998, pp. 10–11. (The piece first appeared in *al-Quds,* Arabic daily, October 10, 1998; translated by Joharah Baker.)

5. A good analysis of these changes is provided by Sarah Graham-Brown, "Impact on the Social Structure of Palestinian Society," in Naseer H. Aruri, ed., *Occupation: Israel Over Palestine,* 2d ed. (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1989), pp. 361–397.

6. Statistics show that in 1993, two years after the Gulf War, 40 percent of West Bank families had one or more male relatives living abroad, a sharp decline compared to ten years earlier. UNDP, *At the Crossroads: Challenges and Choices for Palestinian Women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip* (New York: Gender-in-Development Programme, United Nations Development Programme, 1994), p. 6.

7. Cheryl A. Rubenberg, "Twenty Years of Israeli Economic Policies in the West Bank and Gaza: Prologue to the Intifada," *Journal of Arab Affairs* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 28–73.

8. See the analysis by Andrea Rugh, *Within the Circle: Parents and Children in an Arab Village* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 223–224.

9. An excellent discussion of the way Arab children are socialized can be found in Rugh, *Within the Circle,* esp. pp. 172–241.

10. Suad Joseph, "Brother-Sister Relationships: Connectivity, Love, and Power in the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon," in Joseph, ed., *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), pp. 113–140.

11. For an elaboration on some of these points, see Barakat, "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation," pp. 30–35.

12. Rugh, *Within the Circle,* throughout.

13. A good analysis in this regard may be found in Sana al-Khayyat, *Honor and Shame: Women in Modern Iraq* (London: Saqi Books, 1990), pp. 31–45.

14. Rugh, *Within the Circle,* pp. 228–241; Barakat, "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation," p. 30.

15. Some useful comments on these issues may be found in Najah Manasra, "Palestinian Women: Between Tradition and Revolution," in Ebba Augustin, ed., *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 7–20. Also see Juliette Minces, *The House of Obedience: Women in Arab Society* (London: Zed Books, 1980).

16. Rugh, *Within the Circle,* pp. 236–239.

17. Many of these points are elaborated on with additional insights by Rugh, *Within the Circle,* pp. 223–230. Also see al-Khayyat, *Honor and Shame,* pp. 31–45.

18. Rugh, *Within the Circle*, p. 235; al-Khayyat, *Honor and Shame,* pp. 31–33. My observations correlated with these findings.

19. Rugh, *Within the Circle,* p. 236, for quote; pp. 233–237, for general analysis.

20. Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. pp. 28–40.

21. Maria Holt, *Women in Contemporary Palestine: Between Old Conflicts and New Realities* (Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 1996), pp. 67–68, quoting "Psychological and Social Pressures and their Effect on Women's Health," *Sparks* (December 1993-February 1994): 17.

22. Safa Tamish, *Misconceptions About Sexuality and Sexual Behavior in Palestinian Society: Proceedings of Workshops in the West Bank and Gaza* (London: World University Services, in conjunction with the Tamer Institute for Community Education, Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine, 1996), pp. 7–10.

23. Rugh, *Within the Circle,* p. 236.

24. Jamal J. Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law and Under Modern Islamic Legislation,* 2d ed. (London: Graham and Trotman, 1994), pp. 11–13.

25. See Annelies Moors, *Women, Property and Islam: Palestinian Experiences 1920–1990* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 79–148.

26. Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law,* pp. 4–6.

27. Ibid., pp. 36–37.

28. Ibid., p. 27.

29. Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society,* rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 70–71.

30. For a good analysis of early marriage, see Eman Radwan and Emad Munzer, "Early Marriage in the Palestinian Community: Causes and Effects," paper presented at the Third International Conference: Health and Human Rights: Gaza Community Health Programme, October 13–15, 1997, Gaza City, Gaza, Palestine; manuscript.

31. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Preliminary Report, March 1996* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996), p. 121.

32. Ibid.

33. Ibid., p. 123.

34. Marianne Heiberg and Geir Ovensen et al., *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank, and Arab Jerusalem: A Survey of Living Conditions,* FAFO, Report No. 151 (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Norwegian Institute for Applied Social Science, 1994), p. 289.

35. Ibtisam Iskafi, "Women: 90% Uninformed About Sex and Childbearing," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), December 25, 1998, p. 12.

36. Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law,* pp. 36–44; Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law: Iran and Morocco Com-*

*pared* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1993), pp. 191–200; Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil*, pp. 108–120; Amira El Azhary Sonbol, ed., *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996).

37. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil,* p. 121.

38. Judith Tucker has argued in several venues the importance of examining the family structure across time (historically) and across class. See, for example, Judith E. Tucker, "Ties that Bound: Women and Family in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Nablus," in Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 233–253; and Tucker, "The Arab Family in History: Otherness and the Study of the Family," in Tucker, ed., *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 195–207. I agree with Tucker and admire her work, but in this study, depth has been sacrificed on some issues for breadth in others.

39. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil,* p. 135.

40. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey, Preliminary Report,* Table 3.6.15, p. 167.

41. PCBS, *The Health Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Main Findings, January, 1997* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997), p. 44–45.

42. For analysis of these issues, especially from the perspective of population policies, see Rita Giacaman, *Population and Fertility: Population Policies, Women's Rights and Sustainable Development,* Palestinian Women: A Status Report No. 2 (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, 1997), pp. 20–25. And, while pertaining to the Gaza Strip, a very useful article on birth control is Charmaine Seitz, "Bureij Women's Health Center: A Local Approach for Local Problems," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), October 23, 1998, pp. 8–9.

43. The divorce statistics were reported in *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), July 31, 1998, p. 15. The marriage statistics were reported in *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), August 21, 1998, p. 14.

44. Penny Johnson, *Law and Gender,* Palestinian Women: A Status Report No. 8 (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, 1998), p. 9, citing Lynn Welchman, *The Islamic Law of Marriage and Divorce in the Occupied West Bank: Theory and Practice,* Ph.D. diss., Department of Law, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1992.

45. Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law,* pp. 78–80.

46. For a detailed discussion of the *iddat,* see Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law,* pp. 107–114; for a detailed discussion of maintenance, see pp. 63–73.

47. Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, *Towards Equality: An Examination of the Status of Palestinian Women in Existing Law* (Jerusalem: Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling, 1995), p. 12.

48. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil,* p. 49.

49. Moors, *Women, Property and Islam,* p. 147.

50. Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law,* pp. 84–87.

51. Ibid., pp. 87–106. In addition to the five specific conditions under which a woman may petition for *tafriq,* Jordanian law also allows her to apply if a husband fails to honor a stipulation written into the marriage contract.

52. Moors, *Women, Property and Islam,* pp. 127–148.

53. Nahed Abu Tamah, "Women: The Issue of Subordination," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), March 5, 1999, p. 7. Also, Rula Amin, cor-

respondent for CNN, presented an extensive report on the Sarraj case on *CNN World News* on March 9, 1999.

54. Nasir, *The Status of Women Under Islamic Law,* pp. 115–146, provides a detailed legal analysis of all issues surrounding children in divorce. Also see Moors, *Women, Property and Islam,* pp. 137–146; Adrien Katherine Wing, "Palestinian Women: Their Future Legal Rights," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 56–59; Minces, *House of Obedience,* pp. 67–69; Manasra, "Palestinian Women: Between Tradition and Revolution," pp. 16–18.

55. Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen, "To Be an Unwed or Divorced Woman in Palestine," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), May 22, 1998, pp. 6–7.

56. Hayat Ayyad and Samar Shahin, "Marrying More Than One," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), December 11, 1998, pp. 8–9.

57. Ibid., p. 9.

58. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey, Preliminary Report,* p. 128.

59. Philippa Strum, *The Women Are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992), p. 234.

60. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil,* p. 47.

61. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 118.

62. Moors, *Women, Property and Islam,* pp. 146–147.

63. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey: Preliminary Report,* p. 112.

# 5

# Women's Rights and Needs

Six women with considerably different perspectives describe the general situation of Palestinian women.

> *The root causes of women's problems in this society are the political situation—the continuing occupation and the economic situation. No one, men or women, has freedom here. There are no jobs for men, or women. Poverty is women's greatest oppressor. Violence, early marriage, lack of education, too many children—all of these have their root causes in the political economy of poverty. Even women's lack of freedom is a consequence of the occupation—families rightly fear for their daughter's safety and honor when they must confront foreign soldiers whenever they leave their homes.*
>
> —Hala, 51, single, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

> *Lack of job opportunities for women is linked with two things: first, the general economic situation, wherein unemployment for males is extremely high; and second, the political situation, which limits and constrains the possibilities for Palestinian economic development. . . . With regard to education for women, during thirty years of occupation there has been no improvement in any aspect of the educational system. For example, no new classrooms have been constructed in the context of the tremendous population explosion. Also, because the economic situation is so bad, families don't have enough money for school fees, books, uniforms, or, for all camp and most village women, the cost of transportation to a secondary school in another village. If we had schools in every locale and if we had a government that provided education, every girl here would be educated.*
>
> —Ferial, 47, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

*The problem for women here is simply male dominance. Men control women completely—even to the extent of not permitting them to leave their homes. If a woman goes against her husband's wishes—for example, going to a wedding when he says no—he may divorce her. Women have no rights here.*

—Um Sufian, 44, married with four children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

*Women in this society are not respected; their opinions are not taken into consideration. The view is that men are superior—they are the ones who should make all the decisions while women have only to follow whatever decision their husband makes. Women here are humiliated. They don't have any rights either inside or outside their homes.*

—Lamia, 42, married with five children, village resident, "not observant" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

*Women have no control over their lives or their daughters' lives. This is our society and this is the way it always has been. Men make the decisions; women stay at home, cook, raise their children, and obey their husbands. Only men have the right to an opinion. We cannot be away from our culture and traditions. My husband learned from his father and so he teaches his sons. If a girl wants to marry one man and her father wants her to marry another—for certain she will marry the one her father wants. I know. My husband married off our daughter against her will. In such a situation, if a girl refuses, maybe the father will beat her, maybe he will force her out of school, maybe he will even kill her. What is worse is that it isn't just between the girl and her father; the whole extended family—uncles, brothers, cousins—will become involved. Girls have very few choices in our society.*

—Um Dahoud, 40, married with seven children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

*This society doesn't value women as human beings. They marginalize women—they treat them as objects. Men are much more valued.*

—Hadra, 21, married and pregnant, village resident, "not very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

The debate about rights in Arab and Islamic societies is intense and ongoing;[1] however, this is not an appropriate context for an interjection into that debate. Suffice it to say that numerous critics of rights discourse have long argued that the value and meaning of rights are contingent upon the political and social context, are indeterminate, and are dependent on the social categories and collectivities to which people belong.[2] Extending the concept of kinship connectivity elaborated in Chapter 3, I argue here, as Suad Joseph has with regard to Lebanese society, that for Palestinian women (and men) the

concept of rights is "relational." That is, rights flow out of one's relationships. This is in marked contrast to the Western understanding of rights, where rights are considered "individual," or in more progressive perspectives, "collective."

In West Bank rural and camp society, a person has rights by virtue of being invested in relationships. Rights are the outcome of distinctive relationships of mutual obligations among specific other people (kin) and involve relationships that people actively construct and work to sustain. In other words, relational rights are properties of kinship relations and are shifted and transformed as these particular relationships are changed. Moreover, as with kinship connectivity, relational rights intersect with patriarchy and add the important dimension of power to the rights problematic.[3]

The interweavement of patriarchy and rights is expressed in various aspects of symbolic power, including language, religion, ideology, and education. For example, as was discussed in Chapter 3, religion both legitimates patriarchy and defines rights for men and women: Islam does so specifically, Christianity implicitly. Both assert that men and women have equal but not identical—that is, complementary—rights. Islam stipulates that a woman's rights derive from the fact that she "is the guardian of her husband's household and of his children," while men's rights—succinctly defined in the "right to women's obedience"—flow from their inherent rationality, intelligence, and responsibility for family maintenance.[4] In sum, women's understanding of their rights and how those rights should be realized originates in the context of kinship connectivity and is dominated by the relations, roles, responsibilities, norms, and values of patriarchy. These hierarchical power relations result in a distinct domination and subversion of women's rights. This focus on relational rights is not meant to ignore or negate the importance of individual or collective rights. But understanding the nature and meaning of rights as perceived and expressed by Palestinian camp and village women requires a relational framework.[5]

When I began my fieldwork, I asked each respondent a series of questions aimed at determining her perception of women's situation vis-à-vis society and of women's rights: "How do you view the situation of women in this society?" "Do women take all their rights?" "What rights don't they take?" "Why don't women take these rights?" "Where do these rights come from?" "Who should give women their rights?" "What do women need to realize their rights and improve their lives?" "If the Legislative Council passed a law (for example, requiring all girls to complete *tawjihi,* or whatever the particular woman I was interviewing defined as rights not taken), would that help women?" "What are the major problems women face in this society?" "What do you think would be the best ways of solving these problems?" The women responded in terms of their own individual experiences and were far less articulate on the general condition of women; thus, I gradually altered the original

format. All respondents, however, considered rights in relational terms reflecting the structures and discourses of kinship, patriarchy, connectivity, and honor.

This was most striking in women's response to my final question in the interview, "What are your personal hopes and dreams for the future?" Without exception, married women replied by expressing a hope for their children. "I hope my sons will find good wives." "I hope my children will have a better life." Single women tended to express hopes for their parents or siblings: "I hope my brothers finish their education and find good jobs." When I followed up by asking, "But what are your hopes for *you?*" most either repeated what they had previously said or just shrugged silently. Some said "I have no hopes for myself, all my hopes are with my children." A few young single women said they hoped they would marry or that a future husband would be a good man. One woman told me pointedly:

> *Listen, understand. In this society we don't think about "me." We think in terms of our families—what's best for them, what they need. It isn't like your society where people think just about themselves.*
>
> —Samia, 32, single, village resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi*

## PROBLEMS, RIGHTS, AND RIGHTS NOT TAKEN

Respondents most frequently mentioned problems in three broad categories: political/economic, social (societal), and family. Political and economic problems cited by women included: the occupation; poverty; male unemployment; inadequate health care; overcrowding in the camps; lack of facilities for women to socialize; lack of clean, safe places for children to play; lack of libraries; lack of women's centers; and lack of sports centers for women.

Common social problems women articulated included: "Society is too restrictive." "There are too many prohibited things." "Society doesn't value women." "The 'culture of shame' shackles us." "There's too much gossip." "The traditional norms and values constrain us in everything." "Society is too far away from religion." "Society doesn't accept divorced women." And, "Too many jobs are considered shameful." The core of the social problems is well expressed by Rita.

> *All women's problems relate to one issue. Society looks at women as if they are not complete human beings. They don't value you as a whole, independent human being.*
>
> —Rita, 27, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

By far the most extensive and widely articulated concerns among my research community as a whole were family problems: "There are many problems with extended families." "Husbands don't give women adequate money to run the households." "Women are too dependent on their husbands for their every need." "Women are compelled to have too many children." "Men take their wives' salaries." "Husbands are too controlling." "Male dominance is overwhelming." "Women don't take their inheritance." "Women are forced to marry men they don't want." "Too many young girls are forced out of school." "Our biggest problem here is in-laws." "There is too much violence in the family." "Families are too traditional and interfere too much." "Women can't express their opinion in the home." "They can't visit female friends." "Women don't have enough freedom." "It is too difficult for women to divorce while men divorce too easily." Or, conversely, among the Christian community: "It's impossible to obtain a divorce no matter how horrible the circumstances." "Polygamy is the worst problem [Muslim] women face."

In response to the question "What rights don't women take?" six were most commonly cited: (1) the right to education; (2) the right to work; (3) the right to take one's inheritance; (4) the right to have more freedom of movement; (5) the right to choose one's marriage partner; and (6) the right to be free from violence in the home.

### *The Right to Education*

The issue of women and education is analyzed in Chapter 6, but insofar as education is defined as a right, it is addressed in this context. Traditionally, education was considered unnecessary for women, since their place was in the home and kitchen as well as the fields. Today, however, the overwhelming majority of women of all ages in my research community stated that girls should have the right to complete their education. Many women said that education is even more important for a girl than a boy because a man can do anything, whereas a woman—if she has to work—must have a "respectable" job. Yet, there is extraordinary dissonance between what women say they value and the ways in which women actually experience this right. During the period from 1975 through 1996, the percentage of female students in the school population rose from 43.4 percent to 48.9 percent.[6] However, in the 1995–1996 school year, PCBS statistics show that 54.4 percent of girls age 20 had dropped out of school at some level between the first and the twelfth grade.[7] This annual percentage has remained essentially the same for the past ten years. The dropout rates are highest in the villages and only slightly lower in the camps.

There are a variety of concrete reasons for these high dropout rates. In general, both extensive poverty and the Israeli occupation have made it hard-

er for girls to finish school. For example, during the intifada, parents were very concerned about their daughters' honor being sullied by contact with Israeli soldiers and Palestinian *shabab* in the streets. Many girls feared *iskat* (having one's honor tarnished, especially by an enemy) and preferred to be at home. Thus, girls were taken from school and married off at the first opportunity. On the other hand, in the majority of families, by the age of 12 or 13, girls had many household and sibling care responsibilities and had little time to study. In some homes, mothers insisted that daughters complete all their chores before allowing them to study, parents were not particularly supportive of the daughters' educational interests, and there was no quiet space for a girl to sit and concentrate. Many girls just became discouraged and gave up. Typically also, mothers had little education and were unable to assist their daughters with their homework even when they were supportive.

When economic resources are scarce, parents typically elect to educate their sons. Two factors are relevant here. First, families know that sons will support them throughout their lives regardless of the son's own economic circumstances or where he lives. Thus, educating a son is an investment in the family's future. On the other hand, a girl goes to live with her husband's family and thus any earnings accrue to her husband (although, according to Sharia, any money or property that a woman acquires is legally hers to do with as she alone chooses). Sons are also responsible for their sisters' maintenance should they not marry, or become divorced or widowed.

Also, there is an acute shortage of public secondary schools for girls throughout the West Bank. Since the beginning of the occupation in 1967, there has been no significant new school construction despite an enormous increase in the school-age population.[8] If a girl lives in a locale without a public high school and wishes to complete *tawjihi,* she must travel to another village or urban area, which exacerbates parents' concerns about threats to their daughters' honor. Families fear that letting a girl go to school in another locale lessens their control over her and exposes her to a host of potentially compromising situations—such as riding in a mixed *serveece* or talking to a boy. There are no secondary schools for girls (or boys) in any of the refugee camps, and the vast majority of the villages—especially the small rural ones—do not have secondary girls' schools.

Moreover, education as a right has many qualifications. The right to finish her education meant, in most cases, the right of a girl to finish *tawjihi*—usually not the right to education beyond that. *Tawjihi* is a standard examination taken at the end of the twelfth year of school for certification. Approximately twenty-three of my respondents stated that if a girl is "clever," she should have the right to go to university, but only six out of 175 believed that a girl has the right to study abroad. Also, most could not articulate where the right to education came from; they simply seemed to feel that they have

or should have the right to education. With more clarity, the Muslim Sisters and some additional "observant" Muslim women stated that Islam gives women the right to education.

Of particular significance is the fact that, although women gave numerous reasons why girls should have the right to finish *tawjihi,* none of the reasons had anything to do with the personal development or desires of the individual. Instead, they would explain: "She'll be a better mother to her children." "She'll be better able to deal with her in-laws and husband." "She'll be able to help her children with their studies." "If she finishes her education, she will marry later, she'll be more mature, physically and emotionally, and thus will be in better health to bear and raise children." "If her husband dies or divorces her she'll be able to support her family." Regardless of how strongly they felt about the importance of education, almost none of my respondents thought that a government law requiring girls to complete *tawjihi* was a good idea. Typical comments with regard to the utility of secular law in achieving the right to education for girls were as follows. "If a girl wants to drop out of school, she can't be forced to remain." "If a girl is not clever, why keep her in school?" "If a family is poor and can't afford to send her to school, the government can't make them." "Maybe a girl is needed at home—it's up to her mother to determine that." "If a girl wants to marry, that's her choice, she can't be forced to stay in school." "If a father wants to marry off his daughter, that's his decision. No law in the world can interfere with a man's control over his family." Two issues stand out in the foregoing: the social consequences of poverty and the relations of patriarchy that give a father control over his daughter in all aspects of her life.

The complexities of a woman's right to education are reflected in the comments of Aitak.

> *I love school. I'm a good student and I expect to finish* tawjihi. *I would like to be a lawyer and I plan to go to Birzeit University. But I have many responsibilities at home, especially with my younger sisters. My mother is very sick—she has pain throughout her body, her legs, back and hands, so I come directly from school every day to help. I feel very resentful that I have so much to do at home—I barely have time to study, but what can I do. Both my parents say they support my desire to finish* tawjihi *and go to university, but I don't know what will happen. . . . Girls who leave the camp to go to school face many problems from people in the camp. They think if a girl goes outside of the camp she's going to engage in bad behavior—they will say she's a bad girl. Families here don't like it when girls leave the camp and many girls have dropped out of school because they couldn't face the pressure—the talk. They were afraid no one would marry them.*
>
> —Aitak, 15, single, oldest of ten children, camp resident, "moderately" religious (Muslim), attends secondary school in urban area near her camp

In reality, Aitak's ability to fulfill her educational goals will be determined by the needs of her family and the weight of society far more than by her academic skills or individual aspirations. Family needs, poverty, patriarchy, and relationality are also evident in Nada's story.

> *I was 12 when I left school. I didn't want to leave but I had no choice. My mother couldn't do all the housework by herself and she needed me to help. Also, my parents were planning on marrying me off as early as possible so they wanted me to learn housework skills, cooking and so on.*
>
> —Nada, 17, camp resident, married and pregnant with twins, "not very religious" Muslim, completed sixth grade

At 12, Nada was hardly ready to consider what she wanted from the future. Family exigencies buttressed by social norms decided for her. Finally, Fahmi's story connects the issues of early school dropout with the prohibitions on women working.

> *I liked school but our economic situation was very bad at the time, which is why I had to leave. Also, my mother was tired so I was needed to help at home. I had to do all the housework. Actually, I didn't have much time to study when I was in school. Psychologically, leaving school has been very difficult for me. Till now, I cry when I see the girls I went to school with finishing their education. . . . My father is a farmer, and during the winter he has nothing to do and no way to earn any money. I offered to go to work outside the home to help with the family finances. But my father refused. People here in my village think it's shameful when a woman goes out to work—that's why my father refused even though we really need the extra money I could have earned. This has made my life even more difficult because when I finish the housework, I have nothing to do.*
>
> —Fahmi, 18, engaged, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

There are additional considerations when education beyond *tawjihi* is contemplated. In 1995, only 2.5 percent of the entire West Bank female population had a four-year university degree (or a more advanced degree), as compared with 6.1 percent of males.[9] Again the explanations are diverse and complex. For one, obviously, a girl must complete *tawjihi* before advanced education is even a consideration. With more than 50 percent of the female student population leaving school before *tawjihi,* the number of potential candidates is significantly reduced. Poverty is another factor. Few West Bank camp and village families can afford to send sons, typically privileged, to university, let alone daughters. The nature of marriage is a further consideration. Overwhelmingly, camp and village men prefer to marry very young women; girls over 20–22 (in

some cases over 18) are considered too old for marriage. And, it is not just a matter of age per se. As discussed in the previous chapter, camp and village men, and especially their mothers, prefer younger, less educated women because they will be happy to stay at home with the children and will be less likely to challenge their dominance. In other words, too much education (this attitude applies, in many cases, even to completing *tawjihi*) is considered undesirable because of the threat to a mother-in-law's ability to control her son's wife. Thus, before allowing a daughter to enter university, a family would weigh its effect on her marriage prospects. Unmarried women are considered unfortunate, at best, in Palestinian society. Moreover, since marrying down is socially unacceptable in West Bank society, it would be extremely unlikely that a woman's family would agree to their daughter marrying a man with less education than she had. Since, under the present economic situation, very few camp and village men have the opportunity to attend university, this poses an additional constraint on girls attending university even if their families can afford to send them. Among my research community, the most highly educated women were single—in all age categories. Moreover, there is the ever present fear of dishonorable events befalling a woman at a university.

Studying abroad is nearly unthinkable for camp and village women. For example, Um Ali is a housewife who has *tawjihi,* a two-year diploma, and a six-year diploma from a local institution. In 1991 (before she was married), she received a scholarship from a foreign university to study for a B.S. degree. Her father allowed her to go, but one month before she was to depart, he died.

> *Then my brothers interfered and forbade me from going. They told me I would go to the grave before I set foot out of the country. I was so angry I thought about suicide. But I got married instead. Of course my husband wouldn't allow me to go either.*
>
> —Um Ali, 32, married with three children, camp resident, "average" Muslim

Perhaps, in the context of national independence and significant economic growth, the construction of more schools, and the provision of free universal education, some of the problems girls and young women currently face will be ameliorated. But for now, it seems that whether a young woman receives an education is a family decision and not something that could be mandated by an external authority. Thus, a woman's right to education at any level, in a very real sense, should be understood as a property of her relationship with her family as well as a function of social norms. Her family's needs, interests, economic situation, and values, plus society's determinants, affect her ability to actualize this right as much as or more than do her talents or aspirations.

### *The Right to Work*

Second only to education, the overwhelming majority of my respondents stated that they believe women have the right to work. Women and work was discussed briefly in the context of challenges to gender identity in Chapter 3 and is further analyzed in Chapter 6 from a labor force perspective. Here it is examined in the context of rights. The question of the right to work goes to the very heart of patriarchal authority, and perhaps on no other issue is the concept of relationality in rights more evident. For example, at the same time as women declare that they have, or should have, the right to work, they also state that it is their husbands who should give them this right. What women appear to mean, then, in articulating a right to work is rather a need or desire for husbands to be more accommodating in giving them this right. Some women, again mainly the Muslim Sisters but also some very "observant" Muslim women, believe that the right to work is grounded in Sharia—that is, "Islam gives women the right to work" and therefore "real Muslims" would allow their wives to work. Or, "Our tradition has become stronger than religion here. If we had a Muslim state and lived by Sharia, women would have all their rights, including the right to work." Other women said simply that working was a normal right for women and the reason it is not taken resides in society, culture, and tradition. But again, almost all my respondents—regardless of class, education, marital status, locale, age, religion or religiosity—agreed that unless a woman is prepared to carry the matter to divorce, she must accept her husband's decision about not working. (See Rasha's comments, p. 31, Chapter 3.) The only culturally sanctioned alternatives a woman has is talking with her husband, or, if that does not work, asking a close male relative to talk with him. The concept of an inherent, individual right to work for women, apart from the family context, does not exist in my research community.

Moreover, the discourse of honor reinforces women's reluctance to pursue, beyond intrafamily discussions, their perceived right to work. On the one hand, as discussed, a woman dishonors herself (by humiliating her husband) if she takes her problems outside the family. At the same time, the disapprobation with which a man is faced if his wife works—that is, he is considered without honor because an employed wife signifies that he has failed to adequately provide for his family—makes it understandable why men are reluctant to permit their wives to work. Thus there seems to be a circularity in a woman attempting to realize her right to work by seeking her husband's permission. Nevertheless, within my research community this is the only socially sanctioned method of obtaining this right.

The most puzzling aspect of some women's strong advocacy of women's right to work is that many of them are poorly educated (sometimes only to the

eighth or tenth grades), without marketable skills, and would not qualify for many jobs except in factories. Since working in factories is deemed socially shameful, it is difficult to imagine what sort of job opportunities outside the home these women had in mind. In fact, several women stated that they wanted "someone" to provide them with work that they could do in their homes—such as sewing, embroidery, or canning. But, given all of the above considerations, I am forced to reflect on why so many women articulated the right to work as among their first or second priorities. The answer may reside in the fact that the desire to work—to self-actualization or self-fulfillment—is a basic human need unrelated to educational attainment or employment opportunities. It is also possible that at some level, such expressions reflected a desire for greater individual independence and autonomy, in a context (the absence of employment opportunities) where women could avoid actual conflict in a real-world situation. Perhaps too the nature of my question elicited in some women an idealized or recognized response without a great deal of forethought.

These issues are illustrated in the comments of three women. In all cases, it is the contradictions in their words that stand out most strikingly. When asked, "Do women have any rights in this society they do not take?" Um Issam stated:

> *That's a difficult question. Women in Palestine need rights. For one thing there are no job opportunities for women. And, in some families where the economic situation is difficult, they don't let the girls study because of the boys. And, they marry off girls at a very young age. . . . If girls have education, they will have everything else. When we have an educated society all our problems will be solved.* ["If the Legislative Council passed a law requiring girls to complete tawjihi, would that help?"] *No, because such a law would interfere with the rights of the family. . . . Maybe there could be lectures in the schools beginning at an early age to raise girls' consciousness about the importance of education.* ["If a girl wants to study and her father says no. . .?"] *She should try to convince him. If that doesn't work, she can ask one of her uncles to talk with him. In the end, though, it's his decision.* ["You mentioned a lack of job opportunities. . .?"] *Yes, there needs to be more opportunities for women to work. Definitely that is a big problem here. But a husband has the right to prohibit a woman from working. Especially when the economic situation is good, the woman should stay home and care for the children. . . . Women are born to have children and nourish them; men are born to be responsible for taking care of their family. Here, our society demands that women have many children, and religion tells us that a woman's place is in the home.*
>
> —Um Issam, 36, married with six children, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Samia lives at home with her father and two unmarried brothers. She had planned to study for a two-year diploma but her mother fell ill. By the time

her mother died, two years later, her father had rejected three marriage proposals because he wanted Samia to care for her mother. Since then, several married men have proposed, but she has rejected them, not wanting to be a second wife. She does not ever expect to marry. What she wants most in life is to find a job and get out of her father's house for a few hours each day. Her father and her brothers, however, will not allow it.

> *Women's problems? Freedom! Not having any freedom to do anything that they want to do. I want very much to find a job but my father and brothers prohibit it. I'd like to be economically independent and not have to depend on the money my brothers give me but they won't hear of it. They tell me, "You have everything that you need, there is no reason for you to work, we give you all that you need.". . . Just go and find a job? You must be joking! I couldn't do that; I couldn't disobey my father. People just don't do that. It's a matter of respecting my father, no matter what my age.*
>
> —Samia, 32, single, village resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Um Gharib's husband has an engineering degree but works as a cleaner earning about $300 per month. Her comments reflect the social complexities of women's right to work in a situation of extreme poverty.

> *We have many educated women in this society but there are no employment opportunities for them. I would like to work to help ease our economic situation—it's very difficult. My husband won't let me work as a secretary because being a secretary is considered shameful here.* [She worked as a secretary before marriage.] *Recently I completed a sewing course at the women's center hoping I could do sewing in my home. But women don't trust new seamstresses, so it's necessary to have experience working in a sewing factory to establish myself as a professional seamstress. But my husband will not permit me to go to work in a factory—that's shameful too.* [There are two factories in the camp—each has approximately six women working under the supervision of a woman.] *He says my place is at home with the children. He has said, "Maybe, after all the children are in school," but if he says no, finally, it will be no. As I said, there are many educated women here—many with university degrees but their husbands do not permit them to work. I believe that if a husband says no, it must be no. A woman shouldn't go against her husband. She should stay home and be contented, and not create problems that would undermine the marriage. . . . People in our society are the problem. They determine what's* haram *and what's* eib. *All the problems that women face here come from our traditions.*
>
> —Um Gharib, 32, married with five children, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Even more than with regard to education, then, the right to work must be understood in a familial relational context and as a reflection of the interplay between society and the individual.

*The Right to Inheritance*

The right to take one's inheritance was the third most commonly mentioned in this study. Both Muslim and Christian women have a clear and unambiguous legal right to inherit a portion of their father's wealth, even though their portion is less than that of their brothers. Yet, while the great majority of West Bank village women receive an inheritance from their father, they decline to accept it. In the camps, because of the extent of poverty and the absence of land, women are less likely to receive an inheritance. Typically, though not always, the only thing a camp father has to bequeath is his house, and that will be divided, room by room among his sons for their wives and families. But camp women who do receive an inheritance also usually decline to accept it.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of women themselves choose to forgo their right to inherit resides in the nature of familial relationality, kinship connectivity, complementary social norms, and the nature of the particular brother-sister relationship in this society. By giving her brothers her share of inheritance, a woman enhances the status of her kin group and, by implication, herself. Women not only identify with their patrilines, they are also dependent on them. By leaving her legal inheritance to her brothers, a woman reaffirms and strengthens her ties to her closest male kin and reinforces her brothers' obligations to her.[10] It is a brother's responsibility to provide security and material support for a single, divorced, or widowed sister or to give temporary shelter to one who is experiencing marital difficulty, and this obligation would be markedly decreased, perhaps negated, if the sister took her share of the father's wealth. Moreover, without her brothers' backing, a woman's position in her husband's home is weakened; she needs her brothers' support in a conflict with her husband or his family.[11] There is, then, an important, implicit "bargain" in a woman's decision to refuse her inheritance. In exchange for what she gives up, she ensures her brothers' support and protection—a functional and rational choice in the context of West Bank women's economic and social insecurity. This patriarchal bargain is the ultimate meaning of relationality—a woman relinquishes her right to inherit in exchange for her right to her brother's support. Yet, as a consequence of surrendering their right to inheritance, women are not only disinherited, but also increasingly dependent, disenabled, and disempowered. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that the majority of respondents named this right as one not taken, it may not necessarily mean that they want this right.

Moreover, women's relational refusal is buttressed by social norms that deem it shameful for a woman to accept her part of inheritance. The legitimation for this norm is that women do not need their portion of their father's wealth because they have husbands whose duty it is to provide them with economic sustanance. But their brothers do need it since they are responsible for

the maintenance of their wives and children as well as of their sisters and parents. In addition, by equating the acceptance of one's inheritance with shame, the practice is legitimated in the context of the honor code and further reinforced. A woman who wishes to take what her father left her must first stand up—usually in court—to her brothers, virtually guaranteeing their alienation, and then must face community disapprobation. Society will define her as greedy and shameful. The only exception to such a social attitude would occur if the brothers are known to be socially irresponsible vis-à-vis their sisters.

Um Sharif illustrates the strength of this norm even in the face of dire poverty. Her husband has been in prison, with a few "furloughs," for twenty years for political activism and is now serving a life sentence. She and her children live with her infirm elderly in-laws, in a "very poor" economic situation. She has a sixth-grade education and has never worked outside the home.

> *My father is alive but he has already divided the land between my brothers. He wanted to give me a share but I refused. I would never accept an inheritance. It's shameful.*
>
> —Um Sharif, 38, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim

In'am's situation is slightly different in that she is unmarried and living in her deceased parents' house. Typically, single women remain in their father's home permanently or with a married brother if they do not marry.

> *My father left me my portion of the inheritance* [a room in the family house] *when he died. I still have it but if I marry I will give it to my brothers. That will be my choice. Society doesn't accept a married woman taking her inheritance—it is her husband's responsibility to provide her economic maintenance. I would expect any man I marry to provide me with a house.*
>
> —In'am, 31, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

A Christian woman comments similarly:

> *When my father died he left me and all my sisters a portion of the land but we didn't take it. We gave it to our brothers. That's the tradition here—for a sister to give her inheritance to her brothers. I never considered taking it. It would have been shameful.*
>
> —Sara, 38, married with three children, village resident, "very observant" Christian, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

One major consequence of women's forgoing their right to their inheritance is that West Bank village (and camp) women have virtually no independent wealth, placing them totally at the mercy of their husbands in every-

thing, from asking for money for personal needs to initiating—or surviving—a divorce. Such economic dependence further increases male dominance and control and deprives women of even their opinion in vital matters concerning their own lives.

Two exceptions to the traditional practice with regard to inheritance are worth considering.

> *When I got married, my father refused to ask for a dowry. Instead he divided all the land at that time, and at my wedding party he announced to the whole village that he had done this, that it was his will, and that "everybody here is a witness." So, of course, I accepted my share, my brothers never challenged it and no one in the village could speak badly of me.*
>
> —Um Ahmad, 32, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eleventh grade

In the past, it was not uncommon—though rare now—for a village father to make such a public presentation to a daughter in lieu of a dowry.

Yara's story is quite different in that she is asking the court to intervene to obtain her share of inheritance. She has two brothers and two sisters; she is the youngest. Neither of her sisters asked for their share of the inheritance, and they think she is wrong for asking. Her father forced her to leave school and marry a man she never saw until her wedding night. During the first ten years of her marriage she lived with her in-laws in a nearby refugee camp and was miserably unhappy because her mother-in-law treated her badly. She stated that she did not really like her husband, but

> *I was dealing with my husband according to Sharia law. I was a good servant to my husband, I always obeyed him. I did whatever my mother-in-law told me to do, I never complained. But I was terribly unhappy. Then we moved to the Gulf for five years and our marriage became much better—for sure because we were away from his parents. After the Gulf War we had to come back, and I stood up for the first time and said I wouldn't move back in with my in-laws. My husband understood and agreed but we had no money and couldn't afford a house in Ramallah even though he got a job as a mechanic in Ramallah. So we came to live in my parents' home here in the village. But as you can see, this is a terrible situation. My father is dead, my mother is old and sick, the house is old—there isn't even running water, and there is only one room for my husband and me and the five kids. He only comes home once a week, I have all the responsibilities for the children, there is so much pressure—when he does come home all we do is fight. . . . So I decided to ask for the share of the inheritance my father left me. I thought my husband and I could build a house on it and live normally again. All I asked was for two and a half dunums, which is my legal portion. But my brothers refused to give it to me; they are totally against me. The only one in the whole family who talks to me is my mother. After my brothers*

> *refused, I took the case to court. Now it's up to the judge to decide. I don't know how he will rule. My brothers have hired a lawyer to fight against me. Whatever happens, I know they will never again have anything to do with me. And the whole village thinks it's shameful for me to go to court. But it was the only possibility I could think of for building a decent life for me and my children.*
>
> —Yara, 30, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eleventh grade

Unlike Yara, most women would rather renounce their right to inheritance than lose the support of their brothers, weaken their position with their husband and his family, and incur the disapprobation of society.

From another perspective, numerous women told me stories—of neighbors, friends, "distant" relatives (none admitted to being in such a situation themselves)—whose husbands pushed, sometimes forced, the women to take their share of their inheritance. The stories were remarkably similar in content and I heard them in varying locales. Essentially, respondents stressed the untenable situation in which these women found themselves—having to choose between their husband (who might divorce them and take the children if they did not obey or, conversely, use the money from the sale of the property to take a second wife if they did); or their brothers (whose support they might need in the future, especially if the husband divorces them, but from whom they would be alienated if they demanded their share).

### *The Right to Greater Freedom of Movement*

Nearly all respondents expressed a desire for a right to greater freedom of movement. Yet, this is by far the most abstruse rights issue—primarily because it has so many different meanings to different women in different contexts. Indeed, many women do not appear to have a clear idea of even what they mean by "greater freedom." Replies ranged from the right to leave the house (many women are completely confined to their homes) to the right to travel outside the country. At the same time, many expressions of a desire for more freedom were qualified with comments about the perils of "too much freedom," which also meant different things to different individuals. Indeed, the extraordinary ambiguity and contradictions evidenced in women's comments on this issue suggest the depth and strength of women's internalization of the norms and values of patriarchal relationality even in a situation with such indistinct boundaries.

In general, village women have less freedom than camp women have—a surprising number had never even been outside their village. One of my most vivid and poignant moments occurred while talking with an 18-year-old girl from Kubar village who was preparing for *tawjihi.* I asked what were her

hopes and dreams for the future and she replied, "I would love to travel someday." "Where would you like to go?" I asked. "Ramallah," she answered. (Ramallah is 15 kilometers from Kubar and I traveled daily from Ramallah to the village.)

Typically, women must obtain permission from their husbands each time they leave the home. Young, single women are always obliged to have their father's and/or brothers' permission. Yet, married women reported having less freedom after marriage than when they were single, as Um Fadil's comments illustrate.

> *Before marriage I had a lot of freedom but since I've had none. I don't think my husband is any more conservative than most men in this society; conservative is the norm here. But he doesn't allow me to go out of the house to visit friends or even family. I can't go shopping or even to a doctor in Hebron* [8 kilometers away]. *I have to be in the house all the time. I'm not even allowed to go to the women's center in this village. . . . Freedom is the most important thing for women. If women have freedom they can work on all their other rights. I've tried to discuss this with my husband, I've asked him repeatedly to give me a little more freedom, but he will not even talk about it.*
>
> —Um Fadil, 42, married with six children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus one year of college

Nadia too wants more freedom, but she could not articulate what that would mean or why she desired it. We spent some twenty minutes on this issue, and finally she said:

> *I'd feel better as a human being if I had more freedom, I'd feel more self-confident as a woman. That doesn't mean I'm going to engage in any bad behavior. It means I will feel myself as a human being.*
>
> —Nadia, 27, married with three children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

Yusra is illustrative of the women who want more, but limited, freedom.

> *The situation of women is a little better than, say, ten years ago. But still women have a long way to go. For example, women do not have the right to move about freely. If a woman wants to go out, first there will be problems with her family then with society. But so many women who got their freedom, abuse it. When women get their freedom, they start to go out a lot and this will reflect on their reputation in society. People will look down on them and say they are bad women. In our society people like the woman who stays at home. The problem is that too many women don't understand the meaning of freedom—as soon as they have some freedom they start talking with men or sitting with men. And then they go to Ramallah and walk in the streets, all*

*the men look at them. . . . I would like to see women having their freedom in this society but within the norms and culture.*[12]

—Yusra, 30, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

'Ola too wants both more and less freedom.

*Women need to have the freedom to work outside the house. But freedom must have its limitations. Taking care of her husband and children must be a woman's first priority. If she has to go outside the home, it should be very clear to everyone—in the family and out—where she is going, why, and who she will see.*

—'Ola, 25, married with two children, village resident, "very observant" Christian, *tawjihi*

Um Marwan is concerned about certain women having too much freedom.

*If you give an uneducated woman freedom, she will use it in a wrong way. But if you give educated women freedom, they will use it wisely. If a woman is single, her father should determine how much freedom she is allowed. If she is married, her husband should determine it.*

—Um Marwan, 31, married with four children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Soraya demonstrates the social limitations, even greater than familial, that constrain women's freedom of movement—here with regard to travel outside the country.

*There are many social constraints that keep women from making decisions about their own lives. For example, I have been invited to attend a women's conference in Tunis* [Tunisia], *and my parents have given me permission to go. But I was sitting with a group of people recently, discussing the conference. One of the men present asked me, "Are you married?" When I said no, he replied, "How in the world would your family permit you to travel alone?" Their understanding of a woman traveling alone is that, by definition, she will engage in immoral behavior. So, even though my family is convinced about my going, if a person like this begins to spread rumors, my family will end up saying no.*

—Soraya, 28, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

In fact, this was precisely the outcome. A month later, Soraya's father changed his mind and Soraya did not go to Tunis.

Yasrin was severely punished for exercising too much freedom, yet she appears to accept it.

*I was forced to leave school by my brother in the eighth grade because I participated in a demonstration during the intifada. Many girls participated in one way or another at that time, but many were also punished. I didn't want to leave school but I accepted my brother's decision. It is his right to control me because he is a part of this society and that is society's norm.*

—Yasrin, 21, married with three children, camp resident, "moderately religious" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Finally, Ahlan provides another example of how society determines family behavior when it involves women's freedom of movement.

*I go to school in Beit Omar. I have friends in school but I cannot visit them. I cannot visit outside the camp because society doesn't give me the freedom to. My family gives me freedom according to society's rules. I can visit, occasionally, friends here in the camp. I have less freedom than I would like but I wouldn't want complete freedom because that would reflect badly on my reputation. For example, I don't want the right to talk to boys. But I would like to have more girlfriends and be able to do more things with them—of course, not anything that involves bad behavior.*

—Ahlan, 16, single, camp resident, "not observant" Muslim, attends high school outside her camp

In no other area are the cultural retributions for transgression so overwhelming—gossip, shame, dishonor, and a range of punishments—and the definition of transgression so indistinct. Women must walk an extremely fine line, a line that is both absolute and subjective, both perspicuous and recondite. Perhaps herein resides the greatest power of the discourse on honor and shame.

### *The Right to Choose a Marriage Partner*

Another widely articulated right is the right to have a greater say in the choice of a marriage partner. This right involves both more and less than is apparent at first consideration. It includes issues of early marriage, forced marriage, age and timing of marriage, and the forced departure from school to marry. Not more than ten respondents, of any age, thought that girls should select, by themselves, the man they would marry based on meeting and getting to know a man (much less based on "falling in love").[13] As we have seen in Chapter 4, marriage is very much a family matter in West Bank camp and village society; it is the most significant event in a woman's life; and the family is the central social institution. Most women do not want complete autonomy or independence from their family's selection of their husband. Rather, they want more time to "sit with" a prospective husband before the contract is signed

(many women see their husbands only once or not at all before the marriage). They want more of a real choice—less implicit or explicit pressure from their father when he asks them to say yes or no to the man he presents. Most girls do not want to leave school to marry, and most say their parents should have known better, even if the girls did not, than to marry them at 13, 14, or 15. In fact, many respondents in their early twenties who had married at a young age expressed anger and resentment at their parents.

Traditionally in Palestinian society, families arranged marriages without the involvement of the prospective partners. The purpose of marriage was the reproduction of patrilinality and either the unification of two *hamayel* or the consolidation of one. Love, in the romantic Western sense was, and still is, considered not only unnecessary but also potentially destructive of the paternal family, of a mother's social security vis-à-vis her son's allegiance, of a man's obligations to Allah, and of the entire social order. Women are believed to possess such extraordinary wiles that men will abandon their social responsibilities in pursuit of their charms.[14] Thus, romantic love is discouraged. Nevertheless, some older respondents (mainly in their fifties) stated that they had "fallen in love with" their husbands before marriage. Some met their prospective husbands when they came to visit brothers. Others had come to know second or third cousins through family gatherings. As with other issues discussed in Chapter 3, on opportunities for knowing a man before marriage, it appears that women's social space has contracted considerably compared to fifty years ago.

One reason families marry off their daughters early is the fear that they might become involved in "relationships" with boys. A relationship in this social context typically means little more than exchanged smiles, some words, perhaps some letters, and possibly a few discrete meetings. Relationships rarely involve physical contact—usually not even kisses. Nevertheless, they are considered extremely shameful, and parents seek to prevent them at all costs.

Yet, the question of choice is ambiguous too. When a father asks for his daughter's consent to marry a particular man, tradition or custom, combined with socialized passivity, often lead a girl to accede to whomever her father chooses, regardless of her feelings. She agrees because, on the one hand, she has learned to accept her father's authority; on the other hand, and even more important, girls are brought up not to have independent viewpoints, much less to express them. Thus, when a father asks his daughter for her opinion about the man he has chosen to be her husband, most likely it is the first time he has ever asked her position on anything. She is so unaccustomed to having or expressing a view that, on the most important matter in her life, she is unlikely to be able to offer an independent opinion. As one respondent put it,

*Sharia gives women the right to refuse any offer of marriage. But in most cases here, even if the father asks his daughter if she agrees to the proposal—some fathers don't even ask—the daughter typically remains silent. Silent because she doesn't want the man but she's afraid to say no to her father. But, according to our tradition, silence is a sign of agreement. In other words, if a girl says nothing, her agreement is assumed. This is not what Sharia says. But girls remain silent, and only after the marriage too many realize that they have colluded in their own disaster.*

—Mirna, 26, married with one child and pregnant, camp resident, "Muslim Sister," *tawjihi*

Other women's comments are similarly revealing; Jenan stated:

*I don't remember anything about my childhood. I don't even remember having one. . . . I used to study hard, I wanted to complete* tawjihi *but I left school to get married. I didn't want to leave school, I didn't want to get married—my father didn't force me but he strongly persuaded me; I knew that was what he wanted. So I agreed.*

—Jenan, 20, divorced with one son, camp resident, "average" Muslim, completed tenth grade

Fatma:

*My husband and I were neighbors although I hardly knew him—he is seventeen years older than I. He asked for my hand, my parents agreed, and I said yes. In retrospect I think it's very wrong to let a girl marry at such a young age. I was too young to make such a decision. But they didn't force me, I agreed. . . . I hate my husband. He's a monster. He beats me every night. He doesn't give me any money, and economic maintenance is a wife's right. He uses me sexually—he doesn't even try to be affectionate. He just takes me and it's over. I obey him on everything, but even when I am nice to him he beats me. I don't know why he is this way, he just is; or maybe it's because he believes that is the way to better control me. . . . I would never discuss my problems with anyone, it's very shameful here for a woman to talk badly about her husband. . . . I wouldn't divorce him because of the children. Who would support them, I haven't any education or skills. And I don't want to give them to him. If I asked for a divorce, he would automatically get the children. Besides, society doesn't accept divorced women.*

—Fatma, 19, married with two children, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, completed sixth grade

Lina:

*Two of my cousins wanted me and my father didn't want to offend either of his brothers, so he decided to give me to a stranger. I didn't want to leave*

*school, I didn't want to marry, and I certainly didn't want this stranger. But I had no say. It's true that according to Sharia, I had the right to say yes or no, but in reality I couldn't embarrass my father, I couldn't humiliate him in front of his family and society. It wouldn't have been right.*

—Lina, 30, married with five children,
camp resident, "very observant"
Muslim, completed eleventh grade

In West Bank camp and village society, choosing one's life companion is not an individual right any more than marriage is a partnership between two people. Marriages are family affairs, and a girl's choice in the matter (insofar as she has any choice) is related to the needs, interests, and desires of her family. Moreover, since the entire social structure is grounded in the family, marriage is deeply interwoven with the multiple interconnections among women, their families, and society. Marriage is bound by responsibility—to family, to society, to culture, and tradition.

### *The Right to Be Free from Violence in the Home*

The final right I discuss here is the right not to be subject to violence in the home. This is a particularly complex issue to analyze, for at least two basic reasons. First, many women believe that husbands have the right to beat them; second, there are no statistical data on how widespread violence is among West Bank camp and village women. This, of course, is not surprising given the social prohibition on talking outside the family. But there are several excellent studies on the attitudes of West Bank men and women toward wife beating. Significantly, they demonstrate that approximately 50 percent of both men and women believe that it is acceptable for men to beat their wives. Also, there are growing reports attesting to sexual abuse—incest—within West Bank families.[15]

Not one of my respondents agreed that she would ever speak to anyone outside her immediate family about being beaten (see the comments by Marwa and Nada on pp. 31–32, Chapter 3). No respondents admitted to any personal experience of sexual violence, although many said they had heard of it in other families. Nevertheless, women talked freely about wife beating, but from very contradictory perspectives. Among those women—roughly 50 percent—who said that wives have a right not to be beaten, about half stated that they were beaten, and half that they were not. However, roughly 50 percent of my respondents stated that if women are beaten, they deserve it. Again, about half of those who said that battered women deserved to be beaten stated that they were beaten, and half not.

Domestic violence in the West Bank undoubtedly has a number of causes. The occupation has involved the violent imposition of a foreign political

and economic regime over Palestinian society. The intifada involved extraordinary brutality and humiliation against the Palestinians. Torture, killings, beatings, imprisonments, house arrests, and detentions were daily occurrences and affected virtually the entire population. These, combined with severe economic measures—forced closures, curfews, unemployment—have left the majority of men feeling emasculated, frustrated, disgraced, shamed, powerless, and unable to protect or to provide for their families. Until today, Palestinian society is characterized by continuing occupation, widespread unemployment, economic stagnation, and extensive poverty. Male frustration from these political and economic circumstances certainly affects domestic relationships. Women too have been both directly and indirectly victimized by the political violence of the occupation and the intifada, though some psychologists claim that women are more likely than men to develop coping mechanisms. On the other hand, women suffer more mental health problems than do men.[16]

Nevertheless, especially given female attitudes sanctioning violence by husbands, I would argue that wife beating has as its primary source patriarchal ideology. Four examples illustrate.

> *We have a good marriage. The only problem in our marriage is economics. My husband has been unemployed for seven years and with eight children we barely survive. But he's a good man—yes, I can say I love him. . . . Yes, he beats me. He beats me a lot. He has beaten me since we married till now. It's that he's nervous because he doesn't have work and can't provide for the family. But I am always patient with him. When he hits me, I understand why and I accept it.*
>
> —Wardi, 40, married with eight children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed sixth grade

> *Yes, my husband beats me sometimes. . . . No, I have never spoken about it to anyone. . . . Why? Because maybe he will beat me more, maybe he will kill me. And, respectable women don't talk badly about their husbands. Look, the man buys the woman with gold so she is his property. And a man is entitled to do anything with his property he wishes. No law on earth will ever change this.*
>
> —Haifa, 38, married with six children, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Um Ussama considers herself responsible for her batterings.

> *It's a good marriage. He beats me when I make mistakes. I think all men beat their wives. But in my case I deserve it. My husband has girlfriends. He goes out with them a lot, and when he goes out I feel jealous. If I ask him where he's going or when he will come home, he beats me. But I know I'm in the wrong for asking. Men have the right to go wherever they want and do whatever they want—they have their freedom. Maybe it's my fault he goes out*

*with other women, but I think our sex life is good—I never refuse him. I don't know. This is the life God gave me. I must accept it.*
—Um Ussama, 29, married with five children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Um Taher, who has never been beaten, also believes that men have a right to beat their wives.

*In most cases, women who are beaten ask for it. If a husband beats his wife, there must be a good reason—for sure she has asked for it. Before condemning men who beat their wives, we should be aware of the reasons that provoke them. I don't necessarily think beating should be a man's first response. First he should tell her what she's doing wrong; if she doesn't change, then he can torture her psychologically—refuse to talk to her, stay out of the house for a week or so, refuse to have sex with her—things like that. Then if she still doesn't correct herself, he is fully entitled to beat her.*
—Um Taher, 29, married with four children, village resident, "not religious" Muslim, completed tenth grade

Analyzing that group of battered women in my research community who say they have the right not to be subject to violence, suggests additional patriarchal constraints in terms of what they believe they can do to prevent violence by their husbands. A Muslim woman has the option of taking a violent husband to Sharia court, but very few do—out of fear that their husbands will divorce them as punishment for publicly embarrassing them. Rashida's story demonstrates the many complexities involved in the issue of violence.

I interviewed her in her father's home, where she has been for the past six months. She related that the main problem in her unhappy marriage is her in-laws, who interfere in every aspect of their lives. Her husband has been ill for most of the past seven years and she has "nursed and cared for him," assumed all the responsibility for the house and children, and made and sold plastic flower arrangements to put food on the table. She described at length the violence in her marriage, which has been continuous.

*He beat me if I asked for money for the children, he beat me when I got sick, he beat me for everything, he beat me for nothing. During the times when he was very sick, he was nice to me—I was all he had. But as soon as he regained a little strength, the beatings resumed again. I told him from the day we married that I didn't want anything material from him, I only wanted respect. But instead of respecting me, he beat me.*

She also stated that he "was very selfish sexually—he just took me when he wanted me." For eight years she handled the situation "by being quiet and patient." But, six months ago, with her father's support—he is a *sheik*—

Rashida took her case to Sharia court. "By bringing all my doctor's reports of the most serious beatings, I won my case." She asked the judge for an independent house of her own for herself and the children, and she stated that her husband is now constructing it. But although the judge has ordered her husband to build her an independent house, she concluded:

> *I will go back to him as his wife if he wants me. He is the one to decide. His father wants him to divorce me but I don't want it. I will be devastated if he divorces me. Divorce would be extremely difficult on the children—they would be the victims. I think I can endure this man forever on the condition that he doesn't continue beating me. I don't think I could bear the stigma of being a divorced woman.*
>
> —Rashida, 31, married with four children, camp resident, "Muslim Sister," *tawjihi*

Divorce is so shameful for Palestinian women that nearly all respondents said they would compromise with their husbands on any issue that would otherwise lead to divorce.[17] Rashida is unusual among the women in my research community both in her decision to take her case to court and see it through, and in the amount of support she received from her father. The fact that he is a *sheik* undoubtedly was an asset in Rashida's situation.

Conversely, Hanan endured four years of continuous violence until her divorce. She described the constant battering, broken bones, and bruises with considerable difficulty and pain. When I asked her if she ever considered going to Sharia court during this four-year period, she replied:

> *No, I never considered going to court. Once you are married, your husband has the right to do anything with you he likes. My sister was beaten very badly by her husband—she had to be hospitalized for serious injuries. My father went with her to Sharia court but her husband was so angry that she had gone to court, that before the judge ruled, he married another woman and brought her to live in my sister's house. I didn't want that to happen.*
>
> —Hanan, 18, divorced with no children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed sixth grade

Um Moshen:

> *He beat me a great deal until three years ago; he beat the other wife too. It was very humiliating. He beat me for any small reason, he beat me for no reason. He just got mad and struck out at me. Once, when he broke my hand, I took him to court* [Sharia]. *But as I was sitting in the court waiting my turn, I began thinking "What if he divorces me? What would happen to my children?" So I canceled the case and came home.*
>
> —Um Moshen, 35, married with eight children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, completed eleventh grade

Unlike Rashida, Um Moshen did not have the support of her father or any of her brothers. If she had been divorced, she would have been alone in the world.

The voices of my respondents strongly support the argument that patriarchal ideology is at the core of domestic violence. Moreover, in a report on battered women in the West Bank, UNICEF lists all the characteristics of patriarchal kinship, and concludes similarly.

> Gender violence is an extremely complex social phenomena, deeply rooted in gender relations, sexuality, self-identity, and social institutions. Our understanding of the exact causes of gender violence needs refining, although cross-cultural research has identified key predictors of the prevalence of violence against women in any society. These factors are economic inequality between men and women, a pattern of using violence as a means of conflict resolution, male authority and control of decision making in the home, divorce restrictions for women, and strong son preference.[18]

In the social world of my respondents, patriarchy, buttressed both by the discourses of honor and a distortion of Islamic law, sanctions male control of women through physical abuse. Absent a total delegitimation of these ideologies, it is difficult to imagine a situation in which camp and village women will be able to actualize their right to be free from violence in their homes, or even to believe that they have the right not to be battered.

## WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON HOW TO REALIZE THEIR RIGHTS AND SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS

Analyzing women's statements about what they believe to be the best and most effective means of achieving their rights is no less challenging than analyzing the rights themselves. But since women's perceptions of their rights are conceived and expressed in a relational context—the relations of patriarchal kinship connectivity—one would logically expect the solutions to be conceptualized in a similar frame, which indeed they are. Palestinian camp and village women consistently articulated the solutions to their dilemmas in relation to the significant others in their lives. The overwhelming majority of my respondents believed that they could realize their rights and solve their problems only in the context of social relations within the familial framework.

The women who believe that change can come only from within the family offered several suggestions for improving women's situation, including patience, compromise, obedience, more attention to husbands' needs, talking with husbands and trying to convince them, intervention by a male family member if talking fails, and changing themselves and socializing their chil-

dren with progressive values. One woman's comments concisely capture this perspective:

> *If a woman is unhappy she simply has to be patient. She must be patient because of her children. She does not want to lose them. And her house and her money—all which she will lose if he divorces her. If she's a smart woman she can handle problems and she won't lead a miserable life. If her husband makes a mistake, a woman should just digest it, take it in stride, and not create more problems. If she creates problems she will only create more problems for herself. A smart woman ignores her husband's faults, and accepts to make him happy.*
>
> —Um Hussein, 47, married with thirteen children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

It is important to understand, however, that even in the context of patriarchal kinship, women are not completely powerless in their own homes and are often able to obtain the things they want through the family structure.

Bargaining and negotiation, or "reality bargaining" as Lawrence Rosen calls it,[19] is the social process through which gender politics and the ever shifting relations of power between West Bank husbands and wives are played out. But since the kinds of resources that men and women have to draw on in a bargaining process are crucial to the outcome of any negotiation, it is instructive to consider what resources of power women have. One is talking. A woman can "talk with her husband and try to convince him." This may sound like a feeble resource, but not all men are rigid, violent, and irrational. Moreover, women who know how to present an argument rationally and calmly can have an effect on their husbands. Asking a male relative to intervene, especially if it is a male from the husband's side of the family, can also help.

The success or failure of each of these tactics depends considerably on the character and personality of the players involved. Many respondents stated that the most important thing for a woman to have to gain her rights is a strong character and a strong personality. She must be willing to stand up for what she wants and she must have self-confidence and self-trust. Other women told me that "knowing how to handle a man" was the key to getting what they wanted. For some women, this involved flattery, waiting on him attentively, and making him "feel like a man." For others, it involved sexual favors beyond what the husbands requested, including "special efforts" to put on makeup and dress nicely.

There are also a number of negative resources that women control. They can incessantly nag, bicker, recriminate, and argue. They can refuse sex. They can threaten to talk outside the home. They can engage in passive resistance, such as not having meals ready or neglecting the housework. And, they can

engage in intrafamily manipulations—for example, getting their sons to side with them. A woman can also either threaten to return to her natal home, or actually do it, however temporarily. She can have her brothers threaten her husband, and she can go to Sharia court. Ultimately, if she is willing to pay the price, a Muslim woman can attempt to divorce her husband.[20]

Although these individualized personal power tactics do little, if anything, to alter the structurally unfavorable terms of the overall patriarchal script, they often do work to maximize the interests and life opportunities of the women employing them. But, of course, as Deniz Kandiyoti argues, through their actions to resist passivity and total male control, these women become participants with the vested interests in the system that oppresses them.[21] Four women's comments illustrate.

> *When I first began working, my husband objected strongly but I eventually convinced him and now he accepts it. He even helps me with the housework—not because he's innately inclined but because I've worked on him—a lot. At this point, he couldn't forbid me to work; my sons would support me. . . . There are many things I want—to do, to buy, to go—that he initially says no to. But I work on him and I almost always get what I want. I talk with him, I talk and talk until I convince him. I tell him that whatever it is I want is good for him, will make him look good or important in society—he's from a lower social class than I am and he's sensitive to what people think, especially in a class sense. Also, I tell him how much I love him and want him and that "if I didn't love you, I wouldn't have married you."* [Earlier she stated quite the opposite.] *These things affect him and he responds positively.*
>
> —Rifa, 43, married with five children, village resident, "not very religious" Muslim, completed tenth grade plus diploma in practical nursing

> *I can't control my husband, I wish I could. He tries to control us* [she and the children] *and I try to counter him. Sometimes I'm successful. Now that I have the support of the children, we are more than him, so we all talk to him and try to convince him. The children are always with me and that's a big help. But he's stubborn. I consider my greatest victory convincing him to allow our daughters to go to university. At first he was totally, totally against it. But they got scholarships and we talked and talked, and finally he agreed. Two of my daughters have completed their B.A. degrees and are working. They will never have to live like I have.*
>
> —Um Aissam, 47, married with nine children, village resident, "doesn't believe much in religion" Muslim, completed ninth grade

> *Different types of women handle these problems in different ways. Some women are completely passive. They just give up and don't even try. Other women create huge problems and destroy their families when they stand for their rights. But some women stand for their rights and convince their hus-*

*bands. I think the peaceful way is best—to reasonably try to convince the husband to see and understand the woman's point of view and get his permission to go to school, work, or whatever. I don't see any point in being so confrontational and aggressive as to destroy the family.*

—Iqbal, 32, married with five children, camp resident, "Muslim Sister," completed tenth grade

*Women have to have the strength and character to discuss things and be firm with men—not bold and confrontational, just firm and calm. Also, I think it's very important for women to take care of themselves and their appearance. Women must keep themselves attractive to their husbands—this will make their husbands more responsive to their wishes. Appearance isn't everything but it's part of the way women can communicate with men in a positive sense for themselves. A woman must know how to handle a man.*

—Haria, 34, married with three children, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Beyond intrafamily bargaining, respondents had various ideas for improving the situation of women: Separate educational classes in schools on gender equality for girls and boys; special programs in schools for adolescents dealing with such problems as early marriage and dropping out of school: educational programs through schools to raise the awareness of parents; consciousness-raising campaigns; programs for parents to teach them how to raise their children; use of the media to produce and air programs on TV and radio; lectures, seminars, discussion groups, and workshops. And they also suggested "bringing professional women from outside (each given locale) to educate women about their rights." One example:

*We have to work on raising men's consciousness. But if we want to change male attitudes we have to begin working with parents. We have to raise the consciousness of parents so they will give their children—boys and girls—better values and better ideals. Boys need to learn at a very early age to appreciate girls as human beings like themselves. Maybe we could hold classes for new parents or give courses in the schools for the parents of students.*

—Nahla, 28, married with one child, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed tenth grade

A few women advocated such widely diverse ideas as establishing women's committees and women's centers, creating centers where women can engage in sports, implementing an Islamic state governed according to Sharia, instituting training programs for women, creating summer camps for daughters and mothers, providing educational opportunities for women who dropped out of school before *tawjihi,* building parks and recreation centers for women, improving the economy, and providing political and economic inde-

pendence and security. One young director of a dynamic women's center in a refugee camp described these initiatives.

> *We give training courses in many things—sewing, embroidery, weaving, knitting, English, computers, and others. Many women who take these courses are then able to use their skills to earn money working at home and contribute to their family's income. We hold seminars, lectures, consciousness-raising campaigns—though in my mind, the most important thing we do is "home visits" where we go to a girl's home and sit with and talk with her and her family if she is having a problem—for example, if the family wants her to leave school or get married. . . . I think law is a good idea. But laws by themselves won't work; they must be accompanied by consciousness-raising campaigns, informational programs, et cetera, directed at all sectors of society. Ultimately, the most important thing is for a girl to have a strong character, self-confidence, and trust in herself. Then she can do anything.*
>
> —Soraya, 28, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

There are a number of powerful, overlapping dynamics at work here. First, the majority of respondents expressed either serious reservations or outright opposition to anything that entailed women gathering and talking. Respondents overwhelmingly believed that independent (between a husband and wife) solutions to problems are preferable to anything involving female organization, solidarity, social groups, or the like. (Soraya is obviously an exception.) For example, women expressed genuine interest in and willingness to attend lectures on a variety of issues. But they were emphatic about not participating in a discussion group on a similar issue. Asma explains why.

> *Unfortunately, our traditions don't allow women to complain about their husbands, so I don't see the purpose of establishing women's groups.*
>
> —Asma, 27, married with three children, camp resident, "not religious" Muslim, completed tenth grade

Significantly, even among women who acknowledged that their problems were not unique and were widely experienced by women throughout society, when the conversation turned to women's centers, women's organizations, women's discussion groups or committees, attitudes typically ranged from mild opposition to absolute hostility. The concept of working together with other non-kin women as a means of resolving common concerns was essentially unacceptable. Women also consistently insisted that if any groups or activities were to be successfully implemented in their locale, it would be necessary for a woman from outside (preferably from the major regional city)—a "foreigner"—to come to the locale and organize it. For example, a woman from Nablus organizing an activity for women in Sabastya village was con-

sidered infinitely preferable to a woman from Sabastya organizing it. This is because a foreign woman is considered more trustworthy since she has nothing to gain by revealing any observations or information she gleans while working in a particular camp or village. Also, an outsider will likely be an educated professional and be respected as such. This sentiment was strongest in the villages but definitely present in the camps.

Moreover, such attitudes created a form of self-censorship. The few women from villages who stated that they believe a women's center would be beneficial and would support one if it existed also stated that they would never take the initiative to organize such a center. They insisted that "no one would respond or participate," "our motives would be suspect," and people would "talk about us." The prohibition on "talking" is so powerful it extends to any kind of confidential, therapeutic setting as well. This is clear from the words of Safiyya. She is a 23-year-old university graduate with a B.A. in psychology who is unemployed and whose family is in dire economic straits. When I asked her if she ever considered opening a clinic for women in the camp, she responded:

> *No, of course not. The social norms here are very strong against going to a therapist. If it is known that someone goes, people will say she is crazy and it will be a stigma on her whole family. People will talk about her and her family in a very bad way. Also, people wouldn't trust a clinic—they wouldn't trust what I or the clients are doing inside it. They will begin "speculating." Some people might say the clinic is a cover for organizing a political party or, worse, that the clinic is spreading ideas that are not good for the people. For example, telling women how to deal with their husbands wouldn't be considered a good thing for the men. Other people will say the clinic is making women too independent, encouraging them to ask for their rights. Then, maybe the men will beat their wives if they go to the clinic. A husband would beat his wife in such a situation because he wants to stop her from coming because he is afraid that she will learn something there that will lead her to disobey him. Also, of course, he would be afraid that she might talk about him in a bad way. . . . My father would be completely against my opening such a clinic, my older brother too. They would be concerned about all the problems that such a clinic could make for me and in turn for them.*
>
> —Safiyya, 23, camp resident, single, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

Thus, it is apparent that the most basic division in patriarchal kinship—kin versus other—acts to undermine the possibility of solidarity, cooperation, organization, or unity among women. Women are separated from other (non-kin) women ideologically, socially, psychologically, physically, and emotionally. Gender unity or cooperation is thus virtually precluded by the explicit factionalism in the ideology and institution of patriarchal kinship.

The overwhelming majority of my respondents also stated that laws (enacted by the Legislative Council) would be useless because the govern-

ment cannot intrude on family rights. Some believe that such means could be successful but only if they originate at the grassroots. None of the respondents thought that measures imposed from outside or above would be effective. Hala expressed the dominant opinion.

> *Change must start individually, then spread through the grassroots, then bubble up to the social level. . . . There is a role for government—maybe in holding conferences, emphasizing issues, increasing public awareness—things of that nature. Government, by itself, cannot command or legislate social change. A law, any law, by itself, will not work. It has to be accompanied—indeed, preceded—by public campaigns, workshops, the media, the educational system. All these things would have to work together to bring society and a law into harmony. If you just pass a law, society will ignore it. Social change, meaningful social change, takes a very long time. In the villages, for example, the situation is very difficult. To bring about change we would have to organize a systematic effort to contact the women who are educated in each village. We would have to have brainstorming sessions with them to try to understand why some of the problems persist. Then, if we can understand the causes of the problems, we can work together with these women to try to find a solution. But we can't impose solutions from outside. We are dealing with culture here and culture is deeply ingrained. In the camps perhaps we could hold public meetings—the nurseries and kindergartens would be excellent places for such meetings—to bring the mothers together to discuss the problems of early marriage, education, and so on. And, through such public discussions and other public campaigns, maybe we can change some attitudes. But change will only come gradually, very gradually, we can't expect it to happen overnight. And, for sure the government cannot legislate such change.*
>
> —Hala, 51, single, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Though many younger women (and most older ones) express very traditional perspectives in terms of how to take their rights, I observed changing attitudes among several other younger women. Bissan is a case in point. She lives with her family and has two part-time jobs—one requiring that she take a public *serveece*.

> *For women to gain rights, first women must believe that they have rights. Then they should take men beside them instead of being against men. Men and women are not, after all, enemies. Men and women should work together through committees that in turn have a strong relationship with society and with government. Most women now don't even have the consciousness to understand the importance of personal development, but I think that can be changed—I think it is changing somewhat—at least I believe it's possible. That is what I work for in both my jobs; I try to educate women about their rights as women through radio and television.*
>
> —Bissan, 23, single, village resident, "nonbelieving" Muslim, university graduate

A subsequent interaction between Bissan and her mother, Um Aissam, who is 47, a Muslim housewife with nine children and a ninth-grade education, who does "not believe much in religion," was also instructive.

> Um Aissam: *The government, or other organization, cannot protect women inside their homes. Any law to that effect would be useless. If such a law existed and I was beaten* [which she was, she related, constantly through her twenty-six years of marriage], *I wouldn't use it. I wouldn't want to be responsible for putting my husband in prison, no matter how much he abused me. That would be a very shameful thing for me to do.*
>
> Bissan: *My mother's attitude is exactly the problem with women in our society. They suffer and they stay in the house. They think they are wonderful and that they are heroes when they suffer through all these difficulties—being beaten and humiliated by their husbands. There they are, staying, standing by their man, and taking all these difficulties. They think they are honorable women.*
>
> Um Aissam: *I have to admit Bissan is right. That's what women are doing in this society. People will say, "Oh, she's doing such a great job, she's so strong putting up with this stupid brutal man." And they think of her as a good example for other women to follow.*

This analysis of camp and village women's perceptions of their rights and rights not taken, and the preferred means of realizing those rights, illuminates the strength of kinship relationality and patriarchy in this social world. Yet, Palestinian women's general lack of power is a function not only of a social order that legitimates male domination, but also of the circumstances of extreme poverty, geographic isolation, insecurity, the occupation, and the lack of a functioning national state—all of which reinforces reliance on the family and in turn the reproduction of family structures, practices, and ideology. Most West Bank camp and village women hold few independent resources of power—economic or other. Their access to resources is mediated through the family. A husband's wealth or status, meager though it may be, is typically a woman's only channel to resources. Thus, women have a vested interest in maintaining the status and honor of the family, even when that means subordinating their own interests. Moreover, regardless of individualized power, for Palestinian camp and village women, rights are indeed the properties of relationships. Rights grow out of mutual obligations to significant others and are permeated by hierarchies and power relations of domination and subordination. Clearly too the dialectic between society and the individual is ever present and ever reinforcing. Still, individuals such as Bissan, Soraya, and other women, whose voices emerge in Chapter 7, provide a glimpse of changing dynamics.

NOTES

1. Some of the important perspectives on this debate can be found in Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics,* 3d ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999); Kevin Dwyer, *Arab Voices: The Human Rights Debate in the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Asghar Ali Engineer, *The Rights of Women in Islam* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996); Mahmood Monshipouri, *Islamism, Secularism and Human Rights in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998); Anouar Majid, "The Politics of Feminism in Islam," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1998): 321–361; Suad Joseph, "Comments on Majid's 'The Politics of Feminism in Islam': Critique of Politics and the Politics of Critique," *Signs,* pp. 363–369; Ann Elizabeth Mayer, "Comment on Majid's 'The Politics of Feminism in Islam,'" *Signs,* pp. 369–377; Anouar Majid, "Reply to Joseph and Mayer: Critique as Dehegemonizing Practice," *Signs,* pp. 377–389. Also see Ramla Khalidi and Judith Tucker, "Women's Rights in the Arab World," in Suha Sabbagh, ed., *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Restraint* (New York: Interlink Publishing Group, 1996), pp. 9–26; and Mahnaz Afkhami, ed., *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995). All the articles in this edited collection add perspectives to the rights debate.

2. Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 37, referring to, among others, Sonia Correa and Rosalind Petchesky, "Reproductive and Social Rights: A Feminist Perspective," in G. Sen, A. Germain, and L. C. Cohen, eds., *Population Politics Considered* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 107–126.

3. Suad Joseph's work on relational rights, connectivity, and their implications is central to this analysis. In particular, see Joseph, "Problematizing Gender and Relational Rights: Experiences from Lebanon," *Social Politics* (Fall 1994): 271–272; and Joseph, "Introduction: Theories and Dynamics of Gender, Self, and Identity in Arab Families," in Joseph, ed., *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), pp. 1–24.

4. See the analysis by Afzular Rahman, *Role of Muslim Women in Society* (London: Seerah Foundation, 1986). Also see Camillia Fawzi El-Solh and Judy Mabro, "Introduction: Islam and Muslim Women," in El-Solh and Mabro, eds., *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994), pp. 16–19.

5. Joseph, "Problematizing Gender and Relational Rights."

6. PCBS, *Gender and Education in Palestine* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998), p. 2.

7. PCBS, *Education Statistics Series (No. 3): Education Statistical Yearbook 1996/1997, June, 1997* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997), pp. 101–104. The figure in the text was calculated on the basis of a 2.9 percent dropout rate during the first five years of basic education, a 29.3 percent dropout rate during the sixth to tenth years of schooling, and a 19.5 percent dropout rate between the period of entering the eleventh year and before completion of the twelfth grade. The attrition rate is cumulative.

8. Ibtisam Abu-Duhou, "Schools in Palestine Under the Occupation and the Palestinian National Authority," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1996): 16.

9. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Topical Report Series (No.1): Educational Characteristics—Detailed Results, October 1996* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996), p. 25.

10. See Suad Joseph, "Brother-Sister Relationships: Connectivity, Love and Power in the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Lebanon," in Joseph, ed., *Intimate Selving in Arab Families,* pp. 113–140. Joseph's elaboration of the complex dynamics of the brother-sister relationship in the Christian Arab Yusif family in the Camp Trad neighborhood of Borj Hammoud in the Greater Beirut area of Lebanon adds important dimensions to my somewhat reductionist analysis.

11. See the analysis by Annelies Moors, *Women, Property and Islam: Palestinian Experiences 1920–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 53–57.

12. The *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), October 2, 1998, devoted two full pages, 8 and 9, including three different articles, to the problem of "flirting" between young men and women. In "A Bit of Not-So-Innocent Fun," Hamdi Hamamreh discussed the problem of young men "looking" at young women in the streets of Ramallah and quoted an anonymous woman who walks to work daily as saying the police should do something about the boys congregating on the streets because, "My God. If my family knew this was happening, they would be running around looking for those who insulted me, and it would end in a fight." That this woman thought the problem was with the boys was most unusual. Typically, girls are blamed or blame themselves if boys look at them "wrongly"—just as they are blamed if they are raped.

13. A surprising number of women age 20–40, most educated beyond *tawjihi,* told me about their "love" stories—always chaste, sometimes without ever having exchanged a word, in other cases involving a "relationship" of some sort—with men before they married. Still, none stood up to their fathers for these loves, even if the men asked for their hand. And all accepted that it was "better" that their father had chosen a husband for them—even those who were openly unhappy with their husbands.

14. Fatima Mernissi has written extensively about these issues in a variety of venues. See, for example, Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, rev. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), esp. pp. 25–65.

15. Mohammed M. Haj-Yahia, *Beliefs About Wife-Beating Among Arab Palestinian Women from the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Test of a Patriarchal Hypothesis* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Bisan Center for Research and Development, 1996); Haj-Yahia, *A Patriarchal Perspective on Beliefs About Wife Beating Among Arab Palestinian Men from the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Bisan Center for Research and Development, 1996); Haj-Yahia, *Attitudes of Palestinian Girls and Women Concerning Issues of Domestic Violence,* draft report (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Bisan Center for Research and Development), 1995. Also see UPWWC, *Violence Against Women: The Experience of Palestinian Women* (East Jerusalem: Union of Palestinian Working Women Committees, 1992); Bassam Oweidah, "On the Rise: Domestic Violence," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), March 12, 1999, p. 8; and Rita Giacaman, "Between the Physical and the Psychological: Women's Perceptions of Health in the Old City of Nablus," Birzeit University Department of Community and Public Health, 1994, esp. pp. 12–26 on domestic violence (manuscript). On incest, see Haj-Yahia, *Attitudes of Palestinian Girls,* esp. pp. 39–40; Hasan Jabr, "Sexual Abuse Inside the Palestinian Family," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), March 5, 1999, p. 7; and

Fayez Abu Aoun, "Abandoned Children: The Plight of the Foundling," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), January 29, 1999, pp. 8–9, who reports on the growing number of abandoned babies and argues that they are a consequence of sexual abuse within the family. For additional data on both battered wives and sexual abuse in the family, see Maha Abu-Dayyeh Shamas, *Annual Report 1997: Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling* (A/Ram-East Jerusalem: Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, 1998), appendixes 1–3.

16. For a psychological analysis of women's coping mechanisms, see Raija-Leena Punamaki, "Relationships Between Political Violence and Psychological Responses Among Palestinian Women," *Journal of Peace Research* 27, no. 1 (1990): 75–85.

17. For a good analysis see Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen, "To Be an Unwed or Divorced Woman in Palestine," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), May 22, 1998, pp. 6–8.

18. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Problems and Priorities, Resources and Opportunities* (Jerusalem: United Nations Children's Fund, 1996), p. 47.

19. Lawrence Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 44–92. Additional useful analyses of women's resources of power include Lila Abu-Lughod, *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 39–77; and Deniz Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy: A Comparative Perspective," in Nikki R. Keddie and Beth Baron, eds., *Women in Middle Eastern History: Shifting Boundaries in Sex and Gender* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 31–36.

20. Rosen, *Bargaining for Reality,* pp. 30–47; El-Solh and Mabro, "Introduction: Islam and Muslim Women," pp. 4–25.

21. Kandiyoti, "Islam and Patriarchy," pp. 31–35.

# 6

# Women and Social Institutions: Education, Health, and Labor

This chapter examines the three major public institutions in which gender roles, relations, and hierarchies are transmitted and reproduced. The women in my research community made it clear that these were central institutions in their lives. Indeed, it is their very centrality that necessitates a deeper investigation of these structures and the discourses that legitimate them.

## WOMEN AND EDUCATION

The educational system is the paramount agent of secondary socialization and in Palestinian society—after the family—the most important arena in which gender identities and boundaries are transmitted and constructed. The formal educational experience of West Bank camp and village women acts primarily to reinforce and reproduce traditional gender roles and relations. Through education, society achieves a high degree of symmetry between objective and subjective reality, which operates to further internalize the "objectified" social world and to strengthen and consolidate individual female gender roles and identities. The structure of the system, its pedagogic methods, the explicit and implicit values it inculcates, the content of the curriculum, and the sanction of corporal punishment together bring to bear on the consciousness of female students the total force of the institutional order. Through textbooks, teaching methods, and appropriately socialized teachers, girls are confronted with essentially the same institutional program for their role in society as they received during the initial phase of their socialization.[1]

Over the past 100 years, the number of schools in the West Bank has dramatically increased, as has the number of girls in attendance.[2] Nevertheless, attaining education for West Bank camp and village females has not brought about an alteration in their consciousness or in their socially prescribed roles.[3] As a study carried out by the Norwegian Institute of Applied Social Science illustrates, increasing educational opportunities for girls, including those passing the *tawjihi,* provides no overall change in their social position or status within the family.

### *Methodology and Curriculum*

Methodologically, the West Bank public education system is pedantic and formulaic and provides students little or no opportunity for critical, original, creative, or innovative thinking. It is grounded in the scholastic methods of rote learning, memorization, and religious dogma and is buttressed by a socially and quasi-legally sanctioned system of corporal punishment. No aspect of tradition, culture, society, or politics can be critiqued within the schools. One eleventh-grade student told me:

> *Unfortunately we are taught at school that this is a patriarchal society. For example, we are taught that men take all the inheritance and women take none. If we absorb this, when we get out of school we believe that this is life. Patriarchy and everything that it means is presented to us as a given: men dominate, women obey. We are told that women are really only fit to raise children until they are 6 years old; thereafter they should be the responsibility of their fathers. . . . It's all in my social science text. Look, let me show you.*
>
> —Ngat, 17, a village resident, "observant" Muslim, attends girls' public secondary school

Another, much older, woman reflected the same sentiments regarding the curriculum.

> *One of the biggest problems with the education system is that the curriculum isn't appropriate for girls. I hope the people working at the Ministry of Education will change the curriculum so that it benefits girls. As it is, it just reinforces what girls are taught at home. The schools must teach girls what their rights are and how to have the courage to stand up and take their rights.*
>
> —Sumahiya, 35, single, village resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

At the elementary level, all government and UNRWA schools teach Islam as an essential component of the curriculum, plus Arabic, mathematics, basic science, and the rudiments of social studies. At the secondary level, students have a choice of an academic track in either the arts or sciences, or a voca-

tional track. However, only a handful of schools offer vocational education (a problem discussed below). Islam and Arabic are basic to both academic tracks—Islam to all three. (Christians have the option to stay in class and "learn about Islam" or take the period off.) The arts path focuses on literature and is the road overwhelmingly followed by female students at the secondary level. In part, this is because there are very few girls' science schools and in part because socially it is considered the more "appropriate" path for girls. Students completing the arts track can enter teachers' colleges or universities if education beyond *tawjihi* is desired; however, more important, girls on this track continue to be socialized for their roles as wives and mothers. The science track, overwhelmingly filled by males, includes biology, physics, and chemistry and likewise prepares students for entry into colleges and universities. It is far more academically rigorous than the arts track. Regardless of discipline, however, the methodology is formalist, deductive, and rote, and the content is traditional and dogmatic. Moreover, there is a major shortage of classrooms, school libraries, laboratories and lab equipment, audiovisual teaching aids, computers, and other teaching facilities and equipment throughout the West Bank. There are no extracurricular activities, and many schools lack "such essential facilities as proper toilets."[4]

Class size in both government and UNRWA schools is quite large—averaging between forty and sixty students per teacher[5] (greater than the ratio in 1946).[6] Since the 1970s, the majority of schools have been functioning on double shifts, limiting school days to a maximum of four hours and permitting no opportunity for after-school activities. (This was Israel's answer to meeting the educational needs of an expanding population.) Class periods are usually forty-five minutes which, when combined with overcrowding and discipline problems, makes learning difficult. Given the large number of students per classroom, teachers typically resort to lecturing students and having them copy from the blackboard, memorize texts, and recall content on examination. The emphasis on memorization and the lack of active learning does not develop critical thinking or independent reasoning, two abilities badly needed if Palestinians are to develop their society and if women are to acquire the ability to engage their husbands with logic and reason.[7] In short, in the words of Palestinian educator Mona Ghali, writing in 1997, "The dominant teaching methodology is authoritarian and teacher-centered. Education in its current form is about control and power vested in the teacher, with the student a passive vessel."[8]

Moreover, textbooks used throughout the West Bank reflect strict adherence to traditional gender roles, projecting women as unequal to men and dependent on them. School materials typically portray women as housewives in nurturing and passive roles. Women are rarely, if ever, seen in economically active, professional, or decisionmaking roles. If they are portrayed out-

side the family, it is in traditional roles such as teachers, seamstresses, and the like.[9]

### *Education and Violence*

Violence, as discussed in several chapters, has multiple manifestations in Palestinian society. In the context of education, it cannot have anything but a negative impact on a student's ability to concentrate, study, learn, and feel motivated. Yet, legally and socially sanctioned corporal violence is an integral aspect of every girl's (and boy's) educational experience. Numerous young respondents told me of beatings at school. Comments from Nahed, the youngest girl I interviewed, are illustrative.

> *Our teachers beat us a lot—especially our headmistress. They beat us for everything—if we are five minutes late for school or if we don't have our homework prepared, or if we say a word to another girl in class. . . . Once I forgot a book, a religion book. When my teacher found out, she beat me on the hands until they were swollen, red and very painful. I felt so humiliated.*
>
> —Nahed, 14, single, village resident, "not that religious" Muslim, eighth-grade student

Both male and female students are subject to capricious corporal punishment—extending and legitimating the authoritarianism they experience in the family. It is impossible to ascertain if females are affected differently than males by such punishment, but the system as a whole reproduces patriarchal hierarchies, relations, and ideologies, and as such reinforces the entire social system and its legitimating ideologies. One Palestinian analyst commented on how the integration of family and education work in this regard.

> The dangerous thing is that the student has become used to being beaten up by the teacher as an integral part of the educational process. Many parents encourage the teachers to beat up their children on the grounds that the student is always mistaken and the teacher is always right.[10]

Perhaps most striking is that the laws of the PA Ministry of Education, in effect since 1994, do not prohibit the use of corporal punishment, but merely state that teachers should avoid it if possible. In a discussion of the issue in the Palestinian press, Jumana Odeh, who has a daughter in elementary school who has been "disciplined," related that her daughter came home from school one afternoon crying and told her mother, "This morning my teacher slapped me in the face and said I was the rudest little girl she had ever taught." Three months later, Odeh reports that her daughter hates school, has no interest in studying, and has to be forced every morning, in tears, to go to school.[11] Such

a story is not at all unusual. Moreover, one twelfth-grade respondent with a 98 percent average, who plans to be a teacher, told me:

> *When I was in elementary school my teacher, and sometimes even the headmistress, beat me a lot. I haven't been beaten in the last three years because my teachers respect me. I'm a model student. The teachers beat some of the girls in my class. But they deserve it. They are lazy; sometimes they talk out of order and don't show the proper respect. When I'm a teacher, I will beat my students when they deserve it. It's a good way. It teaches respect.*
>
> —Rebab, 17, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, preparing for *tawjihi*

The educational system in the West Bank is a reflection of the nature of patriarchal relations that characterize family, society, and polity. Male or female, the teacher is the authority figure students are required to defer to and to obey. Failure to do so results in any punishment the teacher chooses to mete out. The intifada interrupted traditional student passivity for a time, but since the advent of the PA, teachers are reasserting their authoritarian roles. However, as a result of "accepted" behaviors during the intifada, teachers report far more discipline problems today than prior to the intifada.[12]

Those sectors of West Bank society that are concerned with corporal punishment in the schools are asking the Ministry of Education to tighten its regulations and then enforce them. No one, however, expects the problem to be resolved in the foreseeable future. In addition to the fact that the majority of parents consider it a teacher's right to discipline students as they see fit, the teachers themselves are under enormous stress—not, of course, an excuse. But their salaries are extremely low; and they must deal with very large classes and unruly students, many of whom have been traumatized by the violence of the intifada and violence at home. At the same time, there is a dearth of counseling or other support facilities for students or teachers. Naturally too the classroom reflects the general despair and hopelessness that pervades society.

An additional aspect of violence, education, and the intifada has resulted from prolonged school closures. Between 1987 and 1993, Israel severely and collectively punished Palestinians through lengthy and frequent school closures. (All universities were closed for the entire period.) As a result, an entire generation of students was essentially "lost," from an educational perspective. It is a situation certain to have multiple negative long-term consequences for Palestinian society. Girls, however, were the most traumatized, as they were not only deprived of an education, but were forced to remain inside their homes for these extended periods, and a significant number were married off at extremely young ages. Countless girls who should have been finishing *tawjihi* at 18 were instead caring for two or more young children.

### *Gender Segregation*

The majority of schools—government and UNRWA, at both primary and secondary levels—have separate physical facilities for boys and girls.[13] Again, it is impossible to determine if such separation affects the quality of education afforded females in the West Bank; however, it certainly contributes to the lifelong segregation of the sexes at the social level and the concomitant subordination of females. In the words of one female secondary-level teacher, the education system "perpetuates all the worst features of Palestinian society" and is not at all personally liberating for girls.[14] Similarly, one respondent stated:

> *The single most important thing the school system could do to improve society is to have mixed schools from first through twelfth grades. That way boys and girls won't grow up fearing each other, and they will learn to have normal healthy friendships.*
>
> —Um 'Amr, 27, married with three children, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

### *Vocational or Academic Track: Secondary Level*

The West Bank educational system is also characterized by an inordinate streaming of students at the secondary level into the academic track—either arts or sciences—and a discouragement of secondary vocational and technical training. A number of respondents commented on this phenomenon; Rita succinctly expresses the prevailing sentiment:

> *I strongly believe in education and the right of girls to finish their education. But I don't think that every girl in this society needs to have a university degree. I believe that we need lots of vocationally and technically well-trained individuals. This should be an option for women as well as men and it should begin at the secondary level.*
>
> —Rita, 27, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

Nevertheless, vocational education, or what is more precisely referred to as Vocational Education and Technical Training (VETT), has been sorely neglected in general in the West Bank and most particularly with regard to females. Some vocational training is provided by each sector—government schools, UNRWA, and religious schools. Yet, regardless of the institution offering it, vocational training has had as its objective poverty alleviation through improving economic conditions of households. This has meant that males have been privileged in vocational opportunities, resulting in serious gender disparities.[15] For example, in 1994, at the time the PA assumed control

of the educational system, there were fourteen "postpreparatory" schools and centers available to students who had completed the tenth grade; students at these schools could potentially obtain a certificate after two years. Of the fourteen institutions, only one was for females and only one was coeducational. At the same time, only 3 percent of the total student population (relatively unchanged during the past seventy-five years) was enrolled in VETT. Of this 3 percent, only 14.7 percent were female. Moreover, males have access to twenty-nine courses in the service and construction sectors, including car mechanics, carpentry, general electricity, blacksmithing and welding, aluminum works, and construction skills, while women are restricted, through the segregation of schools by gender, to hairdressing, sewing, or commerce. Since access to training determines access to jobs, VETT-trained women have far fewer employment opportunities than do VETT-trained men.[16]

### *Gender and Vocational Opportunities: Post-*Tawjihi

There is a second level of VETT education: the post-*tawjihi* community colleges and training schools. This constitutes a much larger component of the Palestinian educational system than the post–tenth grade VETT program. However, it too is characterized by significant gender discrimination. There are forty-six such institutions in the West Bank, including fifteen community colleges, ten industrial schools, nine CIVAD (Israeli Civil Administration) centers, five UNRWA schools, four health schools, two commercial schools, and one agricultural school. Community colleges provide some forty-seven fields of training, fourteen of which are teacher training programs; the remainder are technical or semiprofessional, including such things as industrial drawing, engineering, office management, accounting, and computers. Of the fifteen community colleges in the West Bank, two are exclusively female, five exclusively male, and the remaining eight coeducational. While approximately 48 percent of the total students enrolled in community colleges are female, as with the secondary-level VETT programs, here too women are typically streamed into traditional gender training courses. These include teaching, preschool teacher training, nursing, sewing, home economics and house management, nutrition, physiotherapy, home decoration, dressmaking, laboratory analysis, hairdressing, and secretarial skills. Theoretically, the male-oriented courses are open to women (except in the exclusively male schools), but an examination of enrollment by courses reveals that the percentage of women in nontraditional female fields is extremely low.[17]

There are a number of reasons for this, including the inclination of fathers to choose their daughters' courses; socially defined "unacceptable" types of female employment; and expectations related to job opportunities. However, research demonstrates that the majority of girls are enrolled in fields that are

incompatible with their interests. Yet, the same research also shows that even if females enroll in nontraditional training programs, they may not be able to find jobs. Female "employment opportunities are limited in variety which reflects the concept that male wage-earners ought to be given priorities in employment, and that the types of jobs females occupy are traditionally sanctioned."[18]

### *Transforming Patriarchal Roles and Values?*

Gender discrimination and biases are clearly entrenched in all sectors of the West Bank educational system. Given the multi-institutional spheres in which gender roles are reproduced and legitimated, especially in the context of patriarchal kinship, this does not seem surprising. Nor is it surprising to learn how difficult it is to change gender ideation.

Munir Fasheh, a West Bank teacher who was director of the Technical Education Office during the 1970s and later became dean of students at Birzeit University, relates that his years in the Technical Education Office "taught [him] that it is extremely hard to effect real changes—changes in attitudes, values, and relationships—through the formal curriculum and the formal structure."[19] In consequence, he became convinced of the need to establish informal educational forms and activities. In this regard, he promoted the idea among students and teachers of setting up math and science clubs.

In response to his initiative, Fasheh found that the majority of teachers held attitudes ranging from opposition to indifference, while only "a few" were enthusiastic and willing participants. Male students (15–17 years of age) were generally "very enthusiastic," while female students (same age group) were "cautious and critical but interested." Clubs were established throughout the West Bank, but the outcome was most unexpected. The clubs in boys' schools ceased to exist after a few months, because the boys quickly lost interest and few male teachers were committed. The girls' clubs, on the other hand, flourished with ever growing enthusiasm and participation for two years, with the full support, involvement, and encouragement of their teachers until they were forcibly closed by the Israeli military authority, allegedly because they were "a threat to Israel's security."

From the clubs' inception, however, prominent, conservative members of the Palestinian community opposed them and waged constant and vociferous verbal attacks against teacher and student participants. Prior to the closure of the girls' clubs by the Israelis—indeed within months of their formation—the conservative circles began to publicly claim that the clubs were corrupting the girls' morality and were spreading foreign ideas and radical attitudes. From a sociocultural perspective, the criticism leveled against the girls—raising questions of honor and shame—was far more serious than that raised against the

boys. Thus, it is highly significant that the girls persevered and flourished, and the boys did not. Fasheh relates being "puzzled" by the widespread negative response among the Palestinian community to these science and math clubs and concludes:

> But then I realized that encouraging youngsters to think freely and critically and to question things honestly is very dangerous to any authority . . . social, religious, and political authority prefer the production of students who are passive, rigid, timid, alienated, and lacking in self-esteem. . . . The positive and enthusiastic responses were a reaction against the useless and detached knowledge given in the formal education settings.[20]

It is striking, yet telling, that the engagement and interest the female students showed in the math and science clubs were not reflected in any additional girls' science schools or programs.

### *The Effect of Education on Women*

Over the past fifty years, the number of females attending school and completing *tawjihi,* while admittedly impressive in terms of growth, is ultimately less important than the difficult question of how education affects the lives of women who experience it. Does it lead to greater personal empowerment, increased influence within the family, more input into society, higher levels of employment?

Women's participation in the West Bank labor force in 1997 was 14.46 percent.[21] While such participation was up from 8.6 percent in 1967, it is still quite low by third world standards though relatively comparable to other Arab countries.[22] The World Bank argues that there is a direct correlation between female labor force participation and number of years of education, positing that the higher the level of education, the higher the labor force participation rate.[23] On the other hand, research carried out by the Women's Studies Center (West Bank) found that the level of education of 60 percent of West Bank female workers did not go beyond the ninth grade, and 7 percent had no formal education.[24] A study carried out by Rita Giacaman and reported by the UN Development Programme suggests that marital status, not education, is the most important factor in West Bank women's participation in the labor force. Giacaman found that approximately 85 percent of working women are single, 3 percent divorced, 3 percent widowed, and only 7.6 percent married.[25] It is thus apparent that there is not a positive correlation between increasing female educational attainment and female employment.

Insight into the relationship between female educational attainment and women's control over their lives is provided in a study conducted by the Norwegian Institute for Applied Social Science (FAFO). Overall, they concluded

that increasing access for women to education through *tawjihi* did not alter their overall social position and in some cases may have retarded it. On the other hand, women who completed four-year university degrees did experience positive changes in their social relations.[26] However, since the overwhelming majority of my respondents fall into the first category, I believe the FAFO findings are quite relevant.

FAFO conducted a random sample throughout the West Bank and discovered that while there is a correlation between higher levels of education and greater freedom of movement for women, it is negative (except for women who have completed university). Indeed, their data demonstrate that it is age, not years of schooling, that determines a woman's freedom of movement—postmenopausal women having the greatest freedom.[27] The FAFO data also cast doubt on the common assumption that increased education provides women with increased access to resources. FAFO measured women's access to household resources and their access to their own resources—for example, resources gained through inheritance and employment. On access to family resources, the pattern is similar along all educational levels and shows that increased education does not provide women with increased access to their own earned income, to household resources, or to the resources of the wider family (*'ailah* or *hamulah*). Indeed, to the extent that there is a correlation, it is negative. Nor do educated women own or control more resources than their less educated counterparts. Again, age appears to be the crucial determinant. FAFO demonstrated that in almost all cases, women's access to resources is heavily dependent on age and, in particular, their position in the household.[28]

In addition to these major indicators, FAFO explored the relationship between education and quality of life experienced by men and women who have attained equal levels of education. Their study demonstrates that while both men and women educated through *tawjihi* participate more in what may be termed "leisure" activities, men tend to participate in activities conducted outside the home, while women engage in home-based projects. For example, 40 percent of men compared to 27 percent of women take "walks in the countryside." Moreover, 45 percent of men compared to 38 percent of women read books weekly. Twenty-eight percent of men compared to 33 percent of women pursue "hobbies," but it can be assumed that hobbies are things that can be done at home—such as embroidering and knitting. When women were asked about the things that kept them from pursuing their desired leisure activities, 24 percent listed lack of facilities; 21 percent restraints imposed by social conventions; and 17 percent mentioned child care.[29]

The same study inquired into how education correlated with perceptions of personal autonomy and influence in the family. FAFO discovered, predictably, that the extent of influence within the family felt by men across all

educational levels was far in excess of the influence felt by equally educated women. Among women with twelve or fewer years of education, the overwhelming majority felt they have either no or only occasional influence in the family. Even among women with more than thirteen years of education, the correlations are ambiguous: 9 percent felt they had no influence at all in the family; 32 percent said they had "occasional" influence; 32 percent felt they had "considerable influence"; while 27 percent said they had "decisive" influence. This compared with 47 percent of men with more than thirteen years of education who said they had "decisive" influence. Neither males nor females with more than thirteen years of education felt they had any more influence in the wider social arena than uneducated categories of men and women. This finding no doubt reflects the hierarchical, authoritarian manner in which Palestinian society and politics are organized.[30]

Moreover, the study found that most educated men and women placed much greater emphasis on family background than on education as a determinant of achievement—that is, family background is viewed as relevant to position held. However, this finding could also be understood in a manner that relates to family as a source of protection and security, as has been suggested in previous chapters. In any case, it was found that kinship bonds were considered more significant than the kinship unit as a transmitter of social status.[31]

The interviews in this study wholly support FAFO's basic finding. Increasing educational attainment for women through *tawjihi* does not significantly alter their roles, relations, positions, opportunities, or values and beliefs in the patriarchal social structure. On the contrary, the higher the level of education (through the twelfth grade), the more deeply internalized are traditional norms and roles.

Examination of pedagogy and curriculum, structural segregation and discrimination, and punishment in the educational system illustrates how the roles, relations, hierarchies, and discourses of patriarchy are transmitted, reproduced, and reinforced among West Bank camp and village women.

## WOMEN AND THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

In few areas do rural and camp Palestinian women have as little control over their lives, or experience greater oppression and gender discrimination, than in the health sphere. Provision for women's health care is substandard, inadequate, geographically inaccessible, and maldistributed. Health and illness were not central issues in discussions with my respondents; however, such matters arose in a variety of contexts with numerous women. What I can definitively say is that not a single woman I interviewed in either the camps or villages is satisfied with the quality of health care available to her. The infe-

rior state of West Bank women's health is due to a combination of patriarchal norms; poverty; Israeli occupation; environmental hazards; a health delivery system that is totally insufficient in providing preventative, diagnostic, curative, or any other aspect of female health care unrelated to reproduction; and an almost exclusively biomedical/clinical definition of health that fails to consider environmental, social, political, physical, biological, class, or gender determinants.[32] In the West Bank, the concept of "health" is reduced to its most elementary biomedical definition in an androcentric context. Reflecting on this, in a December 1998 interview, the director of women's affairs in the PA Ministry of Health remarked on the multiple socioeconomic elements, including gender discrimination, that determine Palestinian women's health. According to Firyal al-Banna,

> The factors affecting women and their health are plentiful, and expose them to illness more readily than men. Some of these factors are strictly biological, such as menstruation, pregnancy, birth, and nursing. However, a woman's status in society also plays a significant role—women are more susceptible to the psychological affects of poverty, domestic abuse, and lack of education.[33]

Unfortunately, this insight is not reflected in the West Bank health care system.[34] This section considers each of these factors in turn.

### *Patriarchy and Women's Health*

The relationship between patriarchy and women's health has been succinctly expressed by three Arab women researchers: "Gender and social roles which privilege men make it difficult for women to receive a fair share of family resources, even when they financially contribute most towards them, within some households. In particular, women have little control over their own sexual and reproductive decisions."[35] As we have seen, society's devaluation of females begins at birth and continues throughout their entire lives. The "culture of silence" insures that women's pain—physical or psychological—will be suffered without complaint, while the patriarchal family structure ensures that the female "self" is least prioritized.

In considering women's health in West Bank camp and village society, it is important to understand that three powerful forces converge: the patriarchal cultural mandate for large families and many sons; the ideology of the Palestine National Movement, which has further reinforced the construct of women as reproducers and has insisted that women's role in the revolution is to provide sons for the cause; and a health care system for women that focuses virtually exclusively on providing reproductive care as a matter of national priority. Yet, given that the entire health care system has been focused on

procreation, women experience a striking contradiction between the public discourse on women's health and the individual encounters they have with the system, where even maternal care is substandard. Moreover, the dominance of the "women as reproducers" perspective has resulted in a serious retardation of many of the most basic female health care practices.

One dynamic related to patriarchy and health care is reflected in the fact that the discourse on honor and shame prevents girls and women from seeking treatment for genitourinary problems. In a study carried out by the Birzeit Community Health Department, West Bank women reported numerous problems, such as pain and burning on urination, burning and pain in and around the vagina, and menstrual pain and irregularity. However, at the same time, they stated that they did not seek treatment for these symptoms because they feel ashamed of them and believe their own wrongdoing must have induced the symptoms—even when they are unaware of committing any improper behavior.[36] In this regard, al-Banna, observed:

> A major concern in our society is young [single] women's reluctance to seek advice or treatment in gynecological matters, including the genitalia and reproductive system. Young women tend to hide such problems for fear they may become the targets of rumors defiling their reputations. However, avoiding treatment is risky because such problems could lead to complications or even sterility.[37]

The Birzeit study found that even married women are so bounded by the fear of "dishonor" that they do not seek treatment. The study could not ascertain whether such complaints were symptomatic of infection and, if so, whether the infections were related to sexually transmitted diseases. With so many men working in Israel and elsewhere, it is possible that they could acquire such diseases and pass them on to their wives. However, no public information or education about these medical issues is available in the West Bank.

Moreover, the discourse on honor and shame gave the Israeli occupation forces a powerful blackmail tool that they did not hesitate to use, particularly at the height of the intifada. They would photograph girls in a store dressing room while trying on clothes or in a café. They would then doctor the photographs to make it appear that the girls were engaged in unacceptable behavior and use the pictures to pressure the girls to inform on their male family members. This practice, referred to as *iskat,* gave rise to enormous anxiety, especially among adolescent girls. In one study, carried out by Nadira Shalhoub Kevorkian using informal interviews, it was revealed that *iskat* was the most intense and frequently expressed fear of teenage girls and young women. There were a number—though not large—of documented cases of such abuse. Yet, they were enough to terrify the entire female population and inflict

tremendous psychological havoc. Because in Palestinian society a family's honor is determined by the virtue of its female members, and since girls are considered responsible and in turn consider themselves responsible for any sexual (or perceived sexual) violations perpetrated against them, self-isolation inside the home became the primary survival mechanism. The dread of *iskat* resulted in girls self-restricting and self-confining themselves to the extent that many would not leave their homes even to go to school (when schools were open), and many others welcomed early marriage as a means to ensure their honor. The absence of any counseling or other support facilities to help girls deal with this problem has had enormous long-term negative effects on their lives.[38]

### *Israeli Occupation and Women's Health*

Overall, the most important reasons why rural women's health care is so poor are lack of services and inadequate care. To a considerable extent, the weakness of the health care system is directly attributable to the legacy of Israeli occupation, during which time the system deteriorated significantly even from the substandard condition it was in under Jordanian rule. In general, Israel declined to permit an expansion of the health care system in a context of enormous growth in the West Bank population. During the period from 1970 to 1983, despite a 45 percent increase in the population, there was no development in the health care sector.[39] In addition, Israeli expenditure on health care for Palestinians was extremely low, especially in comparison to its spending on Israeli Jews. Taking 1992 as a typical year, Israeli government per capita disbursement on health care was $500 in Israel compared to $18–$20 in the West Bank and Gaza,[40] despite immense Israeli taxation of Palestinians supposedly for education, health, and other services.[41] In fact, Meron Benvenisti demonstrates that in 1985, again a typical year, Israel used $80 million out of a collected total of $800 million in taxation from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza for direct public expenditure on Israeli Jews inside the Green Line.[42]

Israel's refusal to permit an expansion of health care facilities is a major reason why existing services are so extremely maldistributed and regionally skewed. For example, in 1996, while the central West Bank had 2.5 available hospital beds per 1,000 residents, in the north region (Nablus area) there were only 0.5 beds per 1,000, and in the south (Hebron area), 0.4 per thousand.[43] Primary care clinics are also unequally distributed across regions. The regional maldistribution was worsened during the intifada when Israel prohibited travel among villages through curfews, roadblocks, and the like. Since 1994, the problem has become even more serious, since West Bank residents have not been permitted to enter Jerusalem for health care (or any other reason)

without a prior written permit from Israel, which is rarely granted. The complete separation of the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip has further fragmented the health service sector and led to unnecessary and financially draining duplication.

Throughout the occupation, Israel has used health as an instrument of war. Rural village and, to a lesser extent, camp women were the main victims, since they were the least capable of reaching the inadequate and maldistributed services that did exist.[44] During and since the intifada, Israeli military checkpoints throughout the West Bank have severely restricted village residents' access to existing clinics and hospitals. Israel often interfered with the delivery of both emergency and routine medical treatment. One such policy involved creating obstacles for ambulances en route to health care facilities. Clinics, hospitals, and other facilities were often raided by soldiers and randomly subjected to tear gas.[45] Also, during the intifada, women suffered directly from Israeli policies. Dozens of camp and village women experienced miscarriages and permanent lung damage resulting from exposure to toxic gas thrown by Israeli soldiers.[46] Commenting on the health care these women received, one respondent stated:

> *During the intifada, there were so many women who participated in the action, and many of them were exposed to tear gas. Some of them miscarried and some were very sick at the time. Some of the women who were exposed weren't too sick at the time, but now they are facing many health problems from the gas. One of my closest friends died recently as a consequence of complications from earlier exposure to tear gas. There's no adequate medical care for these women. In fact there's no adequate medical care for any woman whatever her problem.*
>
> —Rina, 34, married with one child, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Women's health continues to be directly affected by Israel's capricious use of checkpoints in Palestinian areas.[47] For example, in late August 1998, a mother carrying her ill three-month-old son was prohibited by Israeli soldiers from driving the child to a hospital ten minutes from her home in Hebron. She carried the baby to the hospital on foot, a hike of an hour and a half, and the child was pronounced dead on arrival. A second woman (from Beit Ulla, a village near Hebron) in labor, was taken by her mother and grandmother to a hospital in Hebron for the delivery. However, Israeli soldiers would not let the three women pass their newly established checkpoint. The baby was born in the backseat of the car and died shortly thereafter.[48] Such situations have been quite common throughout the occupation, especially during the intifada. I mention these two instances here in the context of the post-Oslo peace process to illustrate that things have changed little for Palestinians in the West

Bank and that women suffer directly as well as indirectly from the continuing occupation.

Israel's housing policies also have negatively affected women's health.[49] Through a series of Military Orders (MOs), Israel came to control all land use in the West Bank, including municipal boundaries, zoning laws, and development plans. One of the many tactics Israel employed in this regard was to make it illegal (by a MO) for any West Bank Palestinian to construct a house—even on undisputed Palestinian-owned land—without first obtaining an Israeli permit. Ninety percent of the requested permits were denied, but demographic pressures forced many families to construct new homes anyway. These homes were in turn deemed "illegal" and subject to demolition. B'tslem, an Israeli human rights organization, reports that between 1987 and 1998, Israel demolished more than 2,000 houses of West Bank Palestinians because they were constructed without a permit.[50]

Israel has implemented its house demolition policy since the beginning of the occupation, though the reasons for it have changed over time. Originally, it was a collective punishment imposed on families of males who were arrested and charged with a security offense—before any trial or conviction. Israel justified this policy as a deterrent to political involvement. In such cases, typically the family was awakened in the middle of the night and told to evacuate, taking whatever they could carry. Before dawn, the dwelling was razed. During the intifada years (1988–1991), Israel demolished more than 780 homes in reprisals against individuals who allegedly took part in the resistance.[51]

The demolition of one house typically renders seven to ten people homeless; usually they have no other place to live and are forced to move back into a relative's home, recreating the intense overcrowding that motivated the new construction in the first place. Families who are victims of home demolitions are overwhelmingly from the lower economic strata, and their new homes have put them deeply into debt.[52] House demolitions result in overwhelming psychological, social, and financial trauma for the family, with an increase in problems such as domestic violence. Women, of course, bear the brunt of all the stress.

The second reason for house demolition is to control the development of Palestinian home construction in the West Bank. Since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, this aspect of the policy has taken precedence over the punishment element. With this, residents are usually given some warning that their home is slated for demolition. Between September 1993 and January 1996, approximately 650 homes were demolished in the West Bank. By the end of 1997, the number had risen to more than 1,000.[53] Israel has undertaken a concerted effort to gain irreversible control over as much West Bank land as possible before any "final status talks" begin. It is concerned that a resolu-

tion of the conflict may involve the possibility that Palestinians will obtain control over certain parts of the West Bank where settlements remain and want to expand. To this end, the house demolition drive has been combined with a massive campaign of land confiscation and construction of new settlements and road bypass systems.

In December 1999, Amnesty International issued a comprehensive report on this practice.

> Since 1987 the Israeli authorities have demolished at least 2,650 Palestinian homes in the West Bank . . . because they did not have a building permit. As a result, 16,700 Palestinians (including 7,300 children) have lost their homes. The number of demolitions per year has not fallen since the Declaration of Principles, signed in 1993. . . . On the contrary—although the number of Palestinians under direct Israeli control is now only one eighth what it was before, the average number of house demolitions per year—226—has even shown a slight increase. The emotional consequences for the families whose homes have been demolished have been traumatic. There is no warning of the time and date of a demolition; the bulldozers arrive accompanied by scores of soldiers armed with batons and guns. They come usually at a time when the father has left the house to go to work; the family may have only 15 minutes to take out what belongings they have before the furniture is thrown into the street and their home bulldozed. On many occasions members of the family and other protestors have been beaten by batons or wounded (and one even killed) by rubber-coated metal bullets. Although the number of houses demolished each year is large, it is small compared with the number which are at any time issued with a demolition order and under threat of demolition. At the present time, it is believed that 1,300 homes, housing a quarter of the population in Area C (the area of the West Bank still under full Israeli control) are under demolition order and perhaps 12,000 homes in East Jerusalem (over a third of the population). . . . *There is no doubt that the reasons for demolition of Palestinian houses . . . are spurious and have no technical justification.* The planning laws have been used by the Israeli authorities to confine Palestinian development to existing locations without providing new development areas to meet demographic needs. Controls have been relentlessly applied. . . . The policy of house demolitions, based on a manipulation of planning mechanisms and closely linked to the confiscation of land and the growth of Israeli settlements, is a grave human rights violation against the Palestinian residents of the West Bank.[54] (Emphasis added)

In addition to house demolitions, Israel's water policies have had a profoundly negative impact on the health of West Bank women.[55] Only 30 percent of all households—camp and village—in the West Bank have access to safe drinking water.[56] Moreover, there are considerable regional differences: in the center (Ramallah area) 8 percent do not have piped water; in the south (Hebron area), 56 percent of rural villages do not have access to piped water; and in the north, 66 percent do not have piped water.[57] Since the beginning of

the occupation in 1967, Israel has controlled all the water sources between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. This has meant, in practice, that Israel has had the exclusive right to open the water sources, to determine the quantities consumed, and to distribute water according to sector and nationality.[58] The establishment of the PA did not change this fact: Israel continues to control all water resources on which Palestinians depend. This, despite the provision in the Oslo Accords stating that the Palestinians were supposed to receive responsibility for managing a large portion of the water system, as well as permission from Israel to slightly increase the quantity of water by drilling several new wells in the eastern aquifer.[59]

Of the total ground water available in the West Bank, Israel and Israeli settlements inside the West Bank use 86 percent, whereas the Palestinians have access to only 14 percent.[60] Because of their proximity to the urban centers, the camps are more likely to have piped water than the villages, but the supply is subject to frequent and arbitrary cutoff, and many homes actually have access to piped water for no more than two or three days a week. Also, the quality of water in both camps and village is dangerously poor.[61] Writing in June 2000 in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz,* Amira Hass states:

> Like every summer . . . all over the West Bank, [this] summer, Mekorot [the Israeli Water Commission] supplies a lower amount of water [to the Palestinians] than it is supposed to . . . the drop this year is around the 30 percent mark, depending on the area. . . . The Civil Administration adds that in any case, cuts in the quantity Israel sells the Palestinians are inevitable. After all, it is inconceivable that water quantities should be cut in Israel when they can easily be cut in the West Bank instead. Long live equality. Water allotments . . . [are] clearly based on the principle of inequality. B'tselem's figures show that 79 percent of the water from the mountain aquifer system—Israel and the Palestinians' clearly common water system—is allocated to Israeli citizens and 21 percent to Palestinians. This system supplies most of the water available to West Bank Palestinians and only a third or so of the water consumed by Israel. . . . The Israeli principle of water distribution here is that every Palestinian must make do with around one-third to one-quarter of the amount that an Israeli uses. Enforcing a water conservation program in Israel means that people will not wash their cars and give up green lawns at the entrance to their homes. [For] . . . *Palestinians . . . [it] means that tens or hundreds of thousands more will not drink enough water, use the bathroom less, not shower for a week or more, do laundry once every two weeks, and risk infection and illness.*[62] (Emphasis added)

Israel has been using areas adjacent to several camps and villages as dumping grounds for both solid waste disposal and water waste disposal.[63] Village wells and springs in the rural areas are rarely tested for contamination nor is the water supply to the camps. Thus, the water that is allocated to Palestinians is increasingly polluted and unsafe for drinking.[64] In villages, women

retain the responsibility of obtaining water for home use when piped water is unavailable. Many women must walk long distances to shallow wells and small springs to fill buckets and tins with water for home use.

### *Poverty, Underdevelopment, and the Environment: Effects on Women's Health*

The health of West Bank camp and village women is also directly related to underdevelopment, poverty, and the special situation of the refugee population. Houses in the refugee camps are constructed of cinder blocks and corrugated asbestos, one dwelling on top of another, and so close together that it is extremely difficult for Palestinian women to preserve sanitation in and around the home. There are few paved streets, only narrow mud alleyways, and no open spaces for recreation. Sanitation is a major problem with open sewers and pit latrines. Of the nineteen refugee camps in the West Bank, only five have access to piped sewage disposal networks. Open sewage disposal canals serve the remainder.[65] Camp density ranges from 50,000 to 100,000 persons per square kilometer.[66] The average household size is nine persons, while nearly 31 percent of households have three or more persons per room.[67] Unbelievably, 18 percent of camp households have no bathroom facilities, and only 12.5 percent have phones.[68] Family tensions are inevitably extreme in such situations, leading to battered wives, daughters being encouraged to marry young to make space for other family members, extreme stress, and all kinds of highly destructive dynamics.[69]

In most of the 508 rural villages in the West Bank, access to basic utilities is a luxury. Fewer than 2 percent of the villages are connected to piped sewage networks, and only 69 percent have twenty-four-hour electricity.[70] Moreover, daily chores expose women to numerous health hazards. Typically, rural women work in the fields, handle large quantities of agricultural produce, keep gardens, secure water, keep solid waste and sewage away from the house, and other tasks. Village women are increasingly subject to health problems from the growing use of pesticides and herbicides in agriculture—though less directly than are men. Israel's land confiscation and water restriction policies have led to a major decline in the Palestinian agricultural sector. Thus, Palestinian farmers have begun to use agrochemicals to increase the productivity of their remaining land. Israeli companies promote and sell these products to West Bank farmers. Some of the chemicals marketed by Israel have been banned in Israel, the United States, and other developed countries because they have been shown to be carcinogenic, mutagenic, and teratogenic.[71] It is thought by a variety of researchers that acute and chronic exposure to such toxic agrochemicals is the cause of the increasing complaints among the rural population about numerous nonspecific conditions such as

gastroenteritis, colds, eye inflammations, rheumatic cramps, insomnia, nervousness, nausea, dizziness, diarrhea, and headaches.[72] Palestinian women are vulnerable to pesticide poisoning because they are exposed both directly as agricultural workers and indirectly in the home, where they pick, wash, and prepare food for consumption by their family. In addition, they wash, usually by hand, the clothes the family men have worn in the fields. In the words of one analyst:

> Palestinian men leave the house to work, leaving the garbage disposal to the overworked Palestinian women. Women . . . have direct and almost sole responsibility for keeping the immediate environment sanitary, with only minimal help from other people or organized authorities. . . . Women, who are primarily responsible for going to the market and shopping, are forced to pick their way through piles of rotted fruits and vegetables and other wastes. Women also find it difficult to dispose of home refuse in city refugee camps and village areas. Where disposal facilities are present, they are few and far apart.[73]

### *Health Indicators and Disease Patterns: Common Gender-Related Problems*

*Nutritional deficiency and iron deficiency anemia.* Health care is somewhat better for camp women than for village women. This is because the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) is responsible for the refugee population, and has constructed and staffed clinics in all the camps. Also, the clinics in the camps tend to have better facilities and more numerous services than most clinics in the rural areas. Many villages do not even have clinics and women must travel—if they can afford to and if their husbands permit it—to a distant village to receive what care is available.

In 1993, UNRWA reported that 50 percent of all women seen in its antenatal clinics suffered from iron deficiency anemia and that it is the "most prevalent and serious nutritional deficiency among the refugee population."[74] Iron deficiency anemia is a serious risk factor for maternal death because it lowers women's resistance to infection and decreases their tolerance to even mild blood loss during delivery. This nutritional deficiency is exacerbated by the demands made on women's bodies from early, frequent, and closely spaced pregnancies.[75] In other words, women's primary assigned gender role places them at serious physical risk. In 1994, UNRWA began a routine iron supplementation program, and some analysts believe the incidence of iron deficiency anemia in the camps is declining. However, there are serious problems with the implementation of the UNRWA program. One involves the fact that the majority of women register for prenatal care late in their pregnancy,

if at all, and their attendance at routine prenatal checkups is irregular. Women also tend to have low compliance with followup hemoglobin examinations, in part because providers sometimes require too many followup tests for women realistically to comply with. In the judgment of two analysts, "women are unable to derive the full expected benefits of nutritional supplementation" as envisioned in the UNRWA program.[76] In the absence of studies of village women, we can reasonably speculate that iron deficiency anemia is at least as severe, if not greater, among these women. Moreover, since the UNRWA program does not extend to the rural villages, it can also be assumed that prevention and treatment of the disease are nonexistent.

Female nutritional problems in the villages and camps begin at a very young age and originate in a clear cultural preference that transcends class, locale, education, and religion. In a study undertaken for the Birzeit Community Health Department, Najwa Rizkallah demonstrates this disabling gender discrepancy: "In our society, male children and fathers are given the more nutritionally and socially valued foods, such as eggs and meat, and food is generally given in larger portions to males compared to females."[77] This statement was borne out in my observations of family eating patterns in the camps and villages where the men were served first and the women ate only what was left after the men had finished. The poorer a family, then, the greater the nutritional risk for females. What is more, malnutrition in mothers results in lower birth-weight babies (disadvantaged as such for eight years) and in breast milk of poor quality.[78] One study, undertaken among villages in the Jordan Valley (Nablus region), demonstrated clear and considerable differences in nutritional status between boys and girls.[79] Similar patterns were found in another study, among villages in the Ramallah region.[80] According to these investigations, the gender differences in nutritional status were most pronounced among children under 5 but gradually disappeared by school age.[81] Other investigators found the most pronounced differences in gender nutritional status among the poor.[82] In the words of Rita Giacaman, director of the Birzeit Community Health Department, "These data suggest that families accommodate girls so long as their financial situation allows it. However, when resources become scarce, families appear to opt to provide for boys first."[83] Given the extent of poverty among the West Bank camp and village population, this is a serious problem for women as a whole.

*Fertility, abortion, and infertility.* An important health indicator in any society is fertility rates. In 1995, the West Bank village fertility rate was 6.39 and the camp rate 6.85.[84] These are among the highest in the world and to a great extent reflect the exigencies of patriarchal kinship buttressed by nationalist ideology and compounded by female social insecurity, poverty, the absence of any social services, and the lack of access to the labor force.[85] As noted in Chapter

4, family planning is available and relatively inexpensive in the West Bank, but there are far fewer clinics offering this service than are needed, and many women do not have easy access to them. A recent unpublished study found that women do not generally seek family planning services until they are 30 years old and/or have had five to seven children.[86] There are also multiple problems associated with family and social acceptance of birth control, and a general lack of understanding of the issue within the matrix of women's human rights.

Numerous international agencies in addition to the PA Ministry of Health and, since 1994, UNRWA (though in only six clinics) currently provide such services. These same institutions are also engaged in the process of formulating future policies in the areas of women's reproductive health, safe motherhood, and child spacing. However, as Jad, Johnson, and Giacaman point out, the projects of these agencies (internationally funded NGOs) are conceptualized from far too narrow a perspective—that is, reducing the population explosion time bomb to ensure more efficacious development and greater economic progress and stability. These analysts note that just as nationalist ideology relegates women to objects with a singular role (reproduction), so too does developmentalism view family planning not in terms of women's needs and rights, but rather as a means to political stability and economic progress.[87] They argue that until other key issues are resolved—decreasing early marriage, improving educational opportunities, increasing employment opportunities, developing public social security, and improving the quality of health and family planning care—women themselves will continue to want large families.[88] As discussed in earlier chapters, women choose to have large families for a variety of social reasons that, unless mitigated, will continue to inform their decisions about family size irrespective of availability, access, or affordability of family planning methods. However, because the World Bank, with its priority of "efficiency," funds and directs most NGOs (including the World Health Organization), the focus of the programs provided by these groups remains narrowly fixed on family planning and reducing fertility.

Abortion is prohibited by Christianity and is severely restricted in Islam and considered culturally shameful. There are no statistics available concerning the practice, although UNICEF reports that "clandestine abortions still occur as 'menstrual regulations' and as dilation and curettage procedures. . . . It is very likely that most clandestine abortions are practiced under safe conditions but the extent to which unsafe abortions occur is unknown."[89]

The prevalence of infertility among West Bank married couples is believed to be approximately 15 percent.[90] It is almost always the woman who is blamed for the problem, and many Muslim men prefer to divorce a woman rather than submit to clinical procedures to ascertain their own reproductive capacity. Little attention has been paid to the infertile couple within the context of family planning or in maternal or child care clinics, although some

such services exist, at significant cost, in the private, urban sector.[91] The reason for such inattention resides, as discussed, in the family planning strategy of the World Bank and the NGOs it supports. It is notable, in this context, that no NGO provides funds for infertility services.[92]

*Gender and infant mortality rates.* Another common health indicator is infant mortality rate (IMR). There is considerable discrepancy among the research institutions reporting this figure, primarily because of the lack of adequate record keeping by hospitals, clinics, and midwives. In 1993, the World Bank reported an IMR of 40–45 deaths per 1,000 live births.[93] Barghouthi and Lennock state that "most community studies estimated IMR to be between 50–70 per 1,000."[94] FAFO proposed an IMR of 48 per 1,000,[95] while a UNICEF study, using indirect methods, confirmed FAFO's findings.[96] The PCBS (statistics bureau) puts the IMR in 1996 at 25 per 1,000 live births in the West Bank,[97] but most other researchers consider this quite low.[98] Whatever the precise number—I believe 28 to 48 is a reasonable deduction—it is far too high. Israel, by comparison, has an IMR of 7.8 per 1,000 live births.[99]

The U5MR rate (deaths under the age of 5, or the postneonatal mortality rate), is 32 per 1,000 in the West Bank. In Israel, it is 9 per 1,000.[100] Of greatest significance, however, is that the U5MR in the West Bank is 20 percent higher for females than for males.[101] This results in a total population ratio of 103.2 males to 100 females.[102] Girls have a 60 percent higher risk of dying from a respiratory disease, a 30 percent higher risk of dying from bacterial infections, and a 50 percent higher risk of dying from congenital anomalies than boys.[103]

Cross-cultural research has determined that where infant mortality is higher for females than males, a strong male child preference exists.[104] As we saw in Chapter 3, the value of male children among West Bank village and camp families was significantly greater than the value of female children. Moreover, according to UNICEF, "Social rather than biological factors most likely account for gender differences in infant mortality."[105] More females than males die in infancy because they may be breastfed for a shorter period, and females may receive less food or less nutritious food. Likewise, parents may hesitate a bit longer to seek medical attention for symptoms of infectious disease when the baby is a girl rather than a boy. In this regard, UNICEF concludes, "Data on Palestinian children seem to indicate that social discrimination against girls does compromise their health and may explain the excess [20 percent] in female infant mortality."[106] The PCBS concurs, stating, "Environmental and socio-economic factors including treatment and care influence post-neonatal mortality . . . Female children were more likely to develop dehydration than males during a diarrhea episode which indicates inappropriate home management and delay in seeking care."[107]

*Maternal mortality rates.* As we have seen, more than half the female population leaves school before completing the full twelve years, and 37 percent of women marry before the age of 17, with 16 percent delivering their first baby before they are 17. These figures explain in part the high maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in the West Bank. PCBS data reveal that the overall national maternal mortality ratio in 1997 was 70–80 per 100,000 live births.[108] This can be compared with 1993 data from Israel that reveals an Israeli MMR of 7 per 100,000 live births.[109] Looked at in terms of age categories, in 1997 the highest MMR in the West Bank was found among women in the 50–54 age group, with 140 deaths per 100,000. The second highest rate was in the 15–19 age group, where there were 93 deaths per 100,000 live births.[110] These MMR figures highlight the mortal dangers women face in a patrilineal patriarchal system that favors early marriage and induces women to continue producing children as long as possible. Even the Palestine Ministry of Health acknowledges that maternal mortality is the third leading cause of death among women of reproductive age. Pregnancy-related hypertension (eclampsia), postpartum hemorrhage, and chronic diseases associated with pregnancy are the leading causes of maternal mortality.[111]

The high rate of maternal mortality throughout the West Bank is also strongly related to the inadequacies of the prenatal, maternal, and postnatal services available to camp and village women. Of the existing 384 clinics in the West Bank (259 operated by the government, 34 by UNRWA, and the remainder by a variety of NGOs), only 41 percent provide prenatal care; 23 percent offer postnatal care, and 8.8 percent provide family planning services.[112] Historically, as a matter of policy, UNRWA clinics did not offer family planning. This policy was an integral part of the nationalist-political demographic program for the production of as many Palestinian children as possible. In 1994, concern over the demographic explosion and political instability prompted UNRWA to offer family planning services in six of its West Bank clinics.[113]

Only seven clinics (1.8 percent) have facilities for child delivery. Only 6 percent of clinics supervise home deliveries,[114] despite the fact that 70 percent of births in the rural West Bank occur at home.[115] Home births are usually attended by a *daya* (traditional midwife), who may or may not be trained, supervised, and integrated into a system of referral and backup. Nine hospitals in the West Bank offer maternity services.[116] Government maternal hospitals handle up to fifty births per day, and labor wards are crowded to such an extent that women frequently have to labor in a chair or in a makeshift bed in the corridor with little or no privacy or midwife support. The postpartum wards, by contrast, are practically empty. Women with normal deliveries, and often even those who have had complications or difficult deliveries, seldom remain in the hospital longer than a few hours.[117]

In 1996, Ayesha Rifai Abu-Hwaij carried out an important study of the gendered nature of reproductive health care in the West Bank for the Birzeit University Community Health Department.[118] She conducted survey research in twenty-three clinics divided among the north, central, and south regions. There were fifty-seven personnel working in these clinics, including twenty-eight doctors, fourteen nurses, six village health workers, and nine qualified midwives; and forty-two individuals from the three regions who used the services of the clinics, including twenty-one men and twenty-one women (married couples). Abu-Hwaij demonstrated that there is widespread gender discrimination throughout the reproductive health care system in several important areas. Her findings include: (1) the extent of services in almost all clinics is restricted to prenatal care, postnatal care, and women-centered family planning services; (2) since most government clinics have doctors only twice a week (some only once), such services as are provided are available only four to eight days per month; (3) unequal gender relations within marriage restrict women's access to clinics—especially when a clinic is some distance from a woman's home, in which situation the patriarchal restriction on women's freedom of movement can be fatal to women; (4) there is a huge gap between knowledge and practice regarding sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)—for example, while nearly half of Abu-Hwaij's respondents think that the source of STDs is "probably men," the norm, nevertheless, is to blame women, reflecting the fact that preconceived ideas about female sexuality in a context of gender inequality are more important than factual knowledge; (5) women in general and rural women in particular take advantage of existing health services to a much lesser extent than do men; and (6) family planning is not only related to a particular husband's desires for more children, but it is even more influenced by society's social norms and values and cultural beliefs.[119] It is also, of course, related to the absence of any public social or welfare services for women, making sons a woman's most valuable old-age social security and maintaining the desire for more sons.

*Reproductive health at the expense of other female health problems.* Despite the inferior reproductive health care West Bank camp and village women receive, it is far superior to any other type of health care available to women. Preventive care is virtually nonexistent. For example, while cancer among both men and women is known to be widespread, there is no cancer registry in the West Bank. One study attempted to analyze all cancer deaths between 1976 and 1992 and determined that the most common cancers among women are breast, colorectal, and uterine. In the mid-1990s, breast cancer alone accounted for 29 percent of all cancer deaths among females. Cervical cancer, combined with ovarian, uterine, and other female genital cancers, account for 14.3 percent of

all female cancer deaths.[120] Yet, there are no information campaigns in West Bank camps or villages regarding breast self-examination and no routine mammography. In some clinics, women who request IUDs receive pap smears when the devices are inserted, but there is little followup; and outside this small group, women do not receive routine pap smears.[121] There are almost no services for women (or men) in areas where many suffer, such as diabetes control, dermatology, ophthalmology, dentistry, and physiotherapy and rehabilitation.[122]

*Menopause, old age, and female life expectancy.* Women face the physical and psychological problems resulting from the hormonal changes of menopause without social or medical support. Some women reportedly experience this transformation as a mourning period for the loss of their role utility (reproduction),[123] while others view their relatively greater freedom of movement and their new role as matriarchs overseeing their households, sons, and daughters-in-law quite positively. Yet, however menopause is psychologically experienced, camp and village women find no support in the health care system for either physical or emotional distress associated with this major life change. Moreover, geriatric women endure the problems of old age dependent on sons and daughters without any social support services. Most research studies show that Palestinian life expectancy for males and females is approximately the same: 65–66 years.[124] What is striking about this figure, however, is that in the developed world, women's life expectancy is four to seven years longer than is men's. In Israel, average life expectancy for males and females combined is 77.2 years.[125]

### *Clinics: Inadequate Care, Maldistribution, and Unique Gender Problems with UNRWA*

The maldistribution of health facilities of all types is a major factor in the substandard health care that village and camp women receive. Many rural villages (227, or 14 percent of the population) have no health facilities whatsoever.[126] Decisions about which villages will have government clinics and what services they will provide are not always reached on the basis of rational analysis. As in all matters, politics and patriarchy play a part. Most villages have a village council—a sort of governing body of local notables elected by the males of the village representing each '*ailah.* The council determines the village's priorities and the distribution of any communal resources. A council that valued health care could lobby the Palestine Authority and possibly influence its decision about the governmental distribution of health resources.[127] Unfortunately, as Um Farah explains, many councils do not.

*The real problem with the poor quality of health care here is that the village council doesn't think it's an important issue. They didn't even want the one clinic we do have, and so they think what we have is more than enough. I think they were, and still are, afraid that if we have a good clinic, the women will get birth control and stop having babies.*

—Um Farah, 38, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed sixth grade

Moreover, where clinics do exist, they do not provide adequate care. There are three basic types: government clinics, NGO-run clinics, and UNRWA clinics. The 259 government-run clinics typically provide the poorest care. Physicians work two days a week for curative services, while nurses and midwives provide preventive services, including prenatal care, well-baby clinics, and vaccination programs. Doctors often see up to seventy-five patients in a day.[128] Many village women told me that the doctors they saw in government clinics told them to come to their private (for-profit) clinics for "additional consultation." The government employs only twenty-six specialists in the West Bank and is thus unable to offer many of the services needed by the population.[129]

Clinics run by NGOs range from "good," especially those run by the Medical Relief Committees, to "very poor." There are no supervisory or regulatory boards to oversee such clinics, and often they are substandard even by third world measurements.[130] However, even those NGO clinics that offer good primary care are at risk of a breakdown because they are funded by external (international) sources whose financing is increasingly coming with restrictions requiring clinics to offer services geared to priorities that are often in contradiction with local needs.

UNRWA clinics, which serve the refugee population, have the greatest diversity of health care. Health services include preventive and curative care, nutritional and supplemental feeding, and prenatal and maternity care, plus (since 1994) family planning in the six selected clinics. Camp children routinely receive vaccinations. In addition to primary services, UNRWA clinics provide prenatal care and have several special clinics for diabetes and hypertension. Eleven centers provide dental services, and laboratory testing is conducted in nineteen centers and outposts. All services, including drugs, are provided free of charge for refugees.

UNRWA health care, however, is not free of problems. Indeed, many analysts argue that there is institutionalized gender discrimination in this system. The fact that UNRWA offered no birth control services until 1994, and in only six clinics since then, is one problem. A second, ultimately more important, issue is the determination of who is a refugee and therefore entitled to receive the health and other services provided by UNRWA. Christine Cervenak, writ-

ing in *Human Rights Quarterly,* has extensively discussed this issue.[131] The original 1948 definition underwent several revisions until one emerged in 1952. It stipulates that a refugee

> is a person whose normal residence had been Palestine for a minimum of two years preceding the 1948 conflict and who, as a result, had lost both his home and means of livelihood. A refugee is now deemed to be eligible for UNRWA relief if: (1) he is in need, (2) he has been residing since the conflict in one of the countries where UNRWA is providing relief, and (3) he is officially and currently registered with UNRWA.[132]

New guidelines to determine who is a refugee were expanded and set forth in 1993, eliminating both the requirement of need and the stipulation that an individual had to reside in one of the countries where UNRWA was operating.

Over time, the question of definition extended to the next generation. Eventually it was determined that children of male Palestinian refugees would be registered with UNRWA, but children of female Palestinian refugees who married unregistered refugee or nonrefugee men could not be registered, and these refugee women were not eligible for UNRWA services unless they became widowed or divorced. Neither were their children eligible. Clearly, as Cervenak argues, this gender discrimination against refugee women married to unregistered refugee or nonrefugee men has resulted in significant discrimination. The son of a refugee who marries a nonrefugee woman does not lose his refugee status, whereas the daughter of that same refugee loses hers if she marries a nonrefugee. Moreover, the children born to the refugee woman married to a nonrefugee man cannot be registered as refugees, while the children of a refugee man married to a nonrefugee woman are registered as refugees. In practice, this means that female refugees and their children, if the woman marries a nonrefugee, are ineligible for any of the services or benefits provided by UNRWA, regardless of how needy they may be. Moreover, since adoption of the 1993 guidelines, UNRWA now permits registration of descendants of "non-needy" registered fathers, while the children of impoverished descendants of out-married refugee women become invisible in the system of registered refugees. At the same time, while an out-married refugee woman may request a separate (from her natal family) UNRWA registration card in her own name, it must include a special symbol, and her children will not be registered on her card. Should her brother, on the other hand, marry a nonrefugee woman, his children will be registered on his card.[133] It seems astounding that an international organization, created by a UN Resolution (Res.164) to provide assistance to Palestinian refugees, would institutionalize such gender discrimination. Nevertheless, as Cervenak argues, "the ultimate message sent to [female refugees] by UNRWA's gender discriminatory poli-

cies are two-fold: (1) your refugee status is invisible to the United Nations; (2) a man's is not, and his status is respected through the generations."[134]

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the health care system available to West Bank camp and village women is shot through with patriarchal hierarchies, roles, norms, relations, and discourses. It reinforces women's shame of and ignorance about their bodies; encourages the gendered division of labor wherein women's primary role is as a producer of children; and fails, at all levels, to meet women's needs. Investigating the health care system illuminates the minute levels at which patriarchal power is exercised and the myriad dimensions of gender discrimination and oppression in this society. The examination also reveals the deleterious effects of poverty, environmental degradation, and the Israeli occupation on the lives of women in this community.

## WOMEN AND THE LABOR SECTOR

A third institution in which gender hierarchies and inequalities are glaringly apparent is the labor sector. In this section, I consider gender relations in the labor sector from two perspectives: (1) the economic and structural determinants that affect women and work in both the formal and informal labor sectors;[135] and (2) the power relations in the patriarchal system (including the honor code) that restrict women from working outside the home and determine what type of work they may do.

Averaging the first three quarters in the period from January 1, 1997 to September 30, 1997, according to the PCBS, a total of 52,653 women were employed in the West Bank representing 16.68 percent of the total number of employed persons (male and female). The female labor force participation rate (defined as that percentage of women age 15 or older who are actually working or who are actively seeking employment and thus considered unemployed) during this period was 14.46 percent.[136] This means that 85.54 percent of all West Bank women age 15 and above were not participating in the labor force—neither working nor seeking work.[137]

The structural issue of greatest significance to women's low labor force participation is the lack of industrialization in the West Bank.[138] Since the outset of the occupation, Israel has pursued a systematic policy of prohibiting Palestinian industrial development in the West Bank. The primary motivation has been to ensure that the West Bank remains a market for Israeli goods.[139] In 1996, the industrial contribution to Palestinian GDP was a mere 13.6 percent.[140] In the same year, the percentage of the West Bank labor force involved in industry was only12.1 percent,[141] while "industry" was only minimally developed. Most businesses are cottage industries that produce only

the most basic products—textiles, clothes, food, beverages, nonmetallic products, metal and metal products, and furniture.[142] This is not the type of industrialization that promotes economic growth and development, and the lack of a viable industrial sector is a severe impediment to female labor force participation. The absence of an independent Palestinian state, the dependent economic relations of the West Bank vis-à-vis Israel, and continuing Israeli prohibitions on the development of Palestinian industry suggest that women are not likely, in the near future, to enter the labor force in much greater numbers than at present.[143]

### *Women and Work*

Historically, Palestinian village women worked—today's camp women were, as discussed, originally villagers. All village women worked in the fields; they also tended livestock, collected water and firewood, ground grain, prepared fires, processed olives, made cheese, pickled vegetables, and baked bread—in addition to cooking, bearing and raising children, and keeping house. Many village women carried their fruits and vegetables to city markets, where they often spent long days attempting to sell their produce. Women's work in this context was not "housework"; rather, it was the basis of production and subsistence and was valued as such. In addition, some village women engaged in straw weaving and sewing, others in midwifery and cosmetology (preparing brides with tattoos of *henna* and applying *kohl* and depilatories).[144] Today, the majority of women are far removed from traditional land-based existence. On the other hand, they cannot be considered to be "modern." There have, of course, been changes—most women no longer have to carry water, most homes have electricity (many have refrigerators and other conveniences). Yet, the majority of the women in my research community exist in an ambiguous situation somehow unsettled between the past, the present, and the future. They have more leisure time and more education, but no opportunities for recreation, employment, or meaningful creative activity. They also have less freedom. In many instances, this confluence of factors inclines women to spend many hours of their day gossiping with their kinswomen, which, in turn, further constrains women's ability to overcome the social shackles of traditional roles, relations, and norms.

The 1948 *nakba* radically transformed every aspect of life for some village women, but after 1967, nearly every woman's life underwent severe changes. Nevertheless, camp and village women continue to work. Few earn a salary and those who do do not control the wages they earn. Yet, while the nature of the relationship between women and work has been transformed in multiple ways, gender relations are little altered. Moreover, insofar as such relations have changed, the alteration has been negative, since women's labor,

so necessary and valuable in the past, is not recognized as such in the present. Women's contributions have been significantly devalued because husbands and wives no longer work side by side in production and subsistence, and because men are paid cash for their work. Also, since work, even remunerative work, does not ensure a worker's independence—this is true for men as well as women—employment has not enhanced social status or influence within families. Power inheres from control over the means and products of labor—something few Palestinian village women have had historically and still fewer have today.

Analyzing women and work today vividly demonstrates how interconnected and how constitutive at so many levels is the matrix of internal and external institutions, practices, and discourses that shape women's lives. To gain this perspective requires a broader examination than simply looking at women in the formal labor force. Therefore, this chapter investigates the range of economic tasks that involve a high level of participation and productivity by women in both the formal and informal sectors.[145] The two sectors of the economy are strongly interdependent, with the formal sector dependent on the informal sector for goods, services, and cheap labor, and the informal sector dependent on the formal sector for a significant portion of its clientele, income, and sources of new income-generating activities. The informal sector does not develop simply in the interstices of the economy in traditional activities deemed unprofitable by the formal, modern sector. On the contrary, far from being a residual sector, it is dynamic, constantly reconstituting itself in response to changing conditions in the so-called modern sector. Indeed, its resilience and growth illustrate its capacity to constantly transform itself in its subordination to the dominant capitalist sector.[146]

## WOMEN AND THE FORMAL SECTOR

The formal sector includes economic activity in three subsectors: (1) agriculture, (2) wage labor in Israel, and (3) all other nonagricultural economic activities, including industry and manufacturing, services, trade, and construction. However, there are enormous gender disparities in each sector both in female participation and in male/female wage differentials.

For example, of all workers in the agricultural sector, 41 percent are women; in the nonagricultural sector of all "professionals"—such as teachers, nurses, technicians, and clerks—35 percent are women. Of all legislators, senior officials, and managers, 13 percent are women. Women constitute 15 percent of the workers among service, shop, and market workers; 13 percent of the workers in crafts and related trades; 9 percent of the workers in "elementary occupations"—that is, unskilled workers; and 1 percent of the plant and

machine operators and assemblers.[147] In all sectors, male median and average daily wages are significantly higher than those paid to women: women's average monthly wages are 7–47 percent lower than the wages of men performing the same work.[148] The following examines labor force participation in the three formal economic sectors: agriculture, day labor in Israel, and all other nonagricultural economic activities.

### *Women in Agriculture*

Agricultural work has been the traditional domain of West Bank village (and camp) Palestinian women. Prior to 1948 and the *nakba,* all women worked on the land, and the land was an integral aspect of their being and identity. The most basic aspects of social life—honor and security—were rooted in the land.[149]

There are several perspectives from which the issue of women and agriculture today can be analyzed. Kitty Warnock proposes three broad categories.[150] In one, at least some of the family men are away working, and bringing or sending home wages, while women continue to work some of the family land. Because these women generally do not produce for sale and do not generate an income, they are unlikely to have much say in family decisionmaking. They constitute the largest group of women working in agriculture. A second category is women who farm full-time with no other major source of income. There are few such women today, and they are mostly females on whom the responsibility of a farm devolved when their husbands died or abandoned them. They are the heads of their households and are responsible for family and farming decisionmaking. The third category comprises women who work as wage laborers on farms that do not belong to them. These are women whose families own no land (including the refugees), or whose land is too small or for some other reason is not worth farming. Such women typically contribute their income to the common family fund and are likely to have very little or no say in decisionmaking.

While women constitute 41 percent of the entire labor force employed in agriculture in the West Bank, they also constitute the majority—60 percent—of the unpaid family workers (those who receive no wages for their labor).[151] When one looks at statistics on paid agricultural workers, one finds that women represent only 5 percent of that group and that they are paid significantly less than their male counterparts ($8.00 versus $10.00 per day).[152] The majority of agricultural workers are male; however, they constitute only 14.6 percent of the entire male labor force, whereas for women, agriculture is the second largest (after "services") market for female labor—accounting for 28.5 percent of all women in the labor force.[153] A more inequitable, gender-segregated situation could hardly be imagined—espe-

cially as both male and female agricultural workers tend to have equally low levels of education.

Four respondents were fully engaged in agricultural production; all, however, worked for free. One only wanted to talk about her political life and her activism on behalf of Palestinian political prisoners. Comments from the other three follow. Um Maher was notable from a number of perspectives. She very much reflected the typical peasant woman in the West Bank prior to 1948. I had heard about her from several other women from her village, who all remarked about her "wonderful marriage" (not a common characterization in the West Bank). A plump, sturdy, pleasant woman, she had just returned from the fields with her husband when I met her. Um Mahr related:

> *We have a good marriage—it's been good from the start and remains so until today. Even our sex life is still great. People talk about us because we have such a good marriage. I've never had to face any problems in my life. I've had a really nice life. All my sons are married and they all have their own independent homes—I don't want to be a "mother-in-law." I get along very well with all my daughters-in-law. . . . I don't have any free time—I barely have time to sit with you. I am all day, every day, with my husband in the fields. We've worked together side-by-side since the day we got married. Life is much easier now than in the early years—now we have electricity so I don't have to gather wood and make a fire, and I don't have to carry water, now we have pipes. The land is ours; we work it for ourselves. I prepare the land with him, we plant it together, we pick the vegetables and fruit, and take it to market together. I preserve a lot of the vegetables so we have them all year—I still bake bread on the taboun. . . . We don't have a lot of money, but my husband always gives me money when I ask, he doesn't even ask what I want it for. And he always takes my opinion about everything. We discuss all decisions and when we disagree, my opinion stands just as often as his does.*
>
> —Um Mahr, 50, married with eleven children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed fourth grade

Um Basal's life, in contrast, is more reflective of the majority of West Bank women who have worked the land. One month after she was married, Um Basal's husband went to Germany to find work and stayed for two years. He came home for one month after the first two years, then returned to Germany for eighteen years. Subsequently, he spent five years in Jordan and five years in Kuwait—coming home only once every two years. He came back to their village for good three years ago. In the thirty intervening years, Um Basal had the sole responsibility for raising her nine children, keeping the home, and maintaining her husband's land. About this experience, she related:

> *I had all the responsibilities for myself and my children, for our land and for taking care of my in-laws. My life was very difficult. I used to carry water and firewood. I picked berries. I cooked over an open fire. And my mother-*

*in-law was very controlling—she didn't help with any of the work, she just supervised me and gave me orders. During all those years, I worked the land and tried to earn some money from it. But I never made much money. I produced enough to feed us—we always had a chicken once a week and vegetables. My children were never malnourished, thank God. After my in-laws died, my life became much better and, though we were still poor, I felt good about managing the land and the children on my own. . . . My husband brought back quite a lot of money when he came three years ago, so we have everything we need now. But during the years he was gone, he only sent money sporadically and I could never count on it or plan for it. . . . I carried so much on my head all those years, today I can't use my eyes to knit or sew. I can barely see the TV. . . . Yes, it was a very hard life. But it was my life; I had control over it. Now this man comes back and expects me to treat him like a husband. I do, but to be honest I resent it very much.*

—Um Basal, 55, married with nine children, village resident, "average" Muslim, never attended school

A third village woman, Um Hussein, also works the land. She presented her life more matter-of-factly than bitter Um Basal or ebullient Um Mahr. Her husband works in a restaurant in Tel Aviv, where he has been employed since 1975, and comes home only once a month for four days. She has had all the responsibility for the farming and the animals and for raising the children. She stated that when the need arose, she hired workers to assist her with the land.

*We have two large pieces of land—one for olive and other kinds of trees, and the other for wheat and vegetables. We also had sheep but I sold them two years ago so I could build a large house so my sons could marry. We began farming in 1972, but then my husband got the job in Tel Aviv in 1975, so I have done the work myself ever since. Of course, my children help at harvest time and in other times of need. But I wanted them to study and do well in school so I didn't want to burden them with too many responsibilities. All my sons have finished school and they all have jobs. We've just finished building this house so now I can begin looking for wives for them. Women in this village only work in agriculture. At least only respectable women. There are a few women working in sewing factories in the village but I don't approve of that kind of work, even here inside the village. . . . I hardly see my husband, I can't really say if it's a good marriage or not. It just is. But I have never taken any decisions about anything—the children, the land, even about leaving the house without obtaining my husband's permission. I phone him in Tel Aviv and discuss whatever issue there is, and I accept his decision. I would not visit a neighbor without asking him, much less decide something on my own about the land. I accept this. Actually, it's a good way because then I do not have full responsibility if something goes wrong. If we decide to plant early, for example, and the crop fails, the responsibility is shared. . . . My life has been hard, yes, but I have no complaints.*

—Um Hussein, 47, married with thirteen children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

These three women present some interesting commonalties as well as contrasts. Um Mahr and her husband share the work and she appears to genuinely share in the decisionmaking. Certainly she feels in control of her life. Um Basal did all the work and made all the decisions by herself (at least after her in-laws passed away). She was independent and efficacious and relatively contented with her life until her husband returned with his cash and assumption of patriarchal authority. Now she is reduced to obedience and deference; she has gone from controlling her own life to deferring to a man she clearly has no feelings for. Um Hussein is an employer, an on-the-scene manager and supervisor, and in spite of her constant phone calls to Tel Aviv, she appears to be a quite capable individual. It is possible (though impossible to know with certainty) that she makes most of the decisions and consults with her husband for the very logical reason of shared responsibility. She appeared quite contented with her life as expressed in a variety of contexts—her sons' achievements, the new house, and her excellent reputation in the village.

### *Women Working in Israel*

While a major, though variable and declining, segment of the male workforce has found employment in Israel, this market has constituted a far smaller sector for females. In 1996, the PCBS reported that females from the West Bank accounted for 3.6 percent of the total Palestinian laborers in Israel.[154] This figure may be underrepresented because women who work in Israel tend not to register with the official labor offices. Because there is a strong social taboo against women working in Israel, female workers do not talk about their jobs. Moreover, Israeli statistics on Palestinian workers have, with few exceptions, not been gender disaggregated.[155] The main reason that so few women work in Israel is the negative social stigma imposed on females who participate in this sector.[156] Conversely, it is completely socially acceptable for men to work in Israel.[157] Nevertheless, West Bank women have worked in Israel since the beginning of the occupation. After the intifada erupted in 1987, many quit for nationalist reasons, while male political activists "told" others to quit. Moreover, by that time the market in Israel had changed, and many jobs previously open to Palestinian women were no longer available. Still, since 1967, women have worked in Israel as domestic help in Israeli homes, in agriculture, in factories (mainly in the food and textile industries), as hospital and hotel cleaners, and in other low-paying, low-status jobs.[158] By the mid-1980s, when many of these jobs had been given to Israelis, Palestinian women tended to be concentrated in the Israeli agricultural sector—the most poorly paid and insecure work for both male and female workers. None of my respondents had worked or were working in Israel.

### *Women in the Nonagricultural Sector*

The national nonagricultural sector of the Palestinian economy comprises, as noted, four main areas of economic activity, including services, industry and manufacturing, trade (wholesale/retail), and construction. Of these four, women tend to be concentrated in the "pink-collar" occupations, working as cleaners, clerks, nurses, teachers, textile workers, and the like—employment traditionally associated with women's domestic role.[159]

In the service subsector, women are concentrated in two main areas—health and education—but even in these areas, there are more men than women.[160] For example, in health and services, the ratio is 45.5 percent female to 54.5 percent male.[161] Most of the women employed in the health and social work subsector work as nurses, nurses' aides, or tertiary staff, such as cleaners or receptionists, in hospitals and clinics. Even in the traditionally female area of education, women make up only 45.3 percent of workers versus 54.7 percent men.[162] Moreover, the higher the educational level, the lower the female participation. Thus, while nearly 100 percent of kindergarten teachers are women, only 15 percent of university professors are women.[163]

Among my respondents, four are employed as secretaries (all single); one works in a factory (divorced); and two are full-time cleaners in institutions (one is separated, one widowed). Twenty-seven work in health and education: four in health services (all married) and twenty-three in teaching (sixteen single, seven married).

Respondents working as teachers provide some insight into the experience of women in this profession. Fifteen are teachers in either public or UNRWA schools—eleven are single, four are married. Eight are kindergarten teachers—five single and three married. All the single women give their salaries to either their fathers or to the brother with whom they are living. All the married women give their salaries to their husbands. With regard to the transfer of their wages to their brothers, the single women appear to be engaged in an implicit "bargain." In return for their monetary transfer, they ensure that their closest male relative will be ultimately responsible for their future well-being. Just as women choose to solidify this commitment from their brothers by refusing their inheritance,[164] so too this factor seemed to be at work here. Safinaz is a single woman living with a married brother and his family in a camp where she is director of the women's center. Previously, she taught sewing for eighteen years.

> *I give all my money to my brother. I built the house we are living in with my money. . . .I don't keep any money for myself. I give my brother my salary freely and I know if I need something in the future he will help me.*
>
> —Safinaz, 40, single, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

On the other hand, since her money paid for the house in which she lives with her brother and his family, it can be assumed she has significant influence in the home, especially vis-à-vis her sister-in-law and her nieces and nephews. Also, the fact that she is employed means that she is not dependent on her brother. The same appeared to be true with other single working women, especially those over 35. Safinaz provided further evidence of her independence when she stated: "I made the *hajj* with another woman and no male accompanied us."

The married women in my research community appeared to be more concerned with such things as building an independent house, educating their children, and other family-related objectives. Thus, giving their earnings to their husbands seemed more of a mutual commitment to family goals. On the other hand, one woman, Atib, 44, a camp resident, told me that she would like to save her money for her children (her husband has seven children by a first wife), but that if she did not turn it over to him, he would divorce her. Yet, she considers her job as supervisor of a women's center "crucial to my personal well being." She bargained hard with her husband to continue working after she married—initially he was completely opposed. Ultimately, giving him her wages was less important to her than remaining employed.

In the West Bank in 1997, women accounted for approximately 18.7 percent of those employed in the industry/manufacturing subsector—mining, quarrying, and manufacturing. Of these, most are employed in manufacturing, especially in the textile and apparel factories, making this the second largest subsector of nonagricultural formal work.[165] The PCBS reports that of the 5,731 West Bank women working in this sector, 81 percent are employed in apparel and textiles.[166] The remaining 20 percent of women in this sector work in factories producing such things as food (sweets, candy, soups), pharmaceuticals, paper, cigarettes, and shoes. Only one of my informants worked in this sector—a divorcée laboring in a sewing factory. Nevertheless, given the large percentage of women engaged in the garment industry, it is important to consider several aspects of this work.

Prior to the Israeli occupation, women from well-to-do, respectable families often worked as independent seamstresses. These highly skilled and socially respected professional entrepreneurs (much in demand for their products and for apprenticeships) made clothes on order for female clients and earned a good living. However, after 1967, less expensive, ready-to-wear clothing flooded into the West Bank from Israel, and demand for custom clothing declined drastically.[167] At the same time, a whole new form of garment production emerged—factories run by Palestinian subcontractors working for Israeli entrepreneurs.[168] In these factories, mostly managed by Palestinian men and staffed by lower-class camp and village women, fabrics that have been obtained by the subcontractors (from Israeli manufacturers) are

"sewn" by guiding material at high speed through machines that produce finished products. It is low-paying, tedious, unskilled work in which Palestinian women have been exploited to enhance the profits of Israeli (and, more recently, Palestinian) entrepreneurs. Over time, a few women have become subcontractors, and a few manage factories. But in a very real sense, the garment industry in the West Bank is highly feminized. Managers and subcontractors (even female ones) tend to prefer female laborers. They work for lower wages than do males; they are perceived as more docile and patient—better suited to tedious, boring tasks; and, most important, because their mobility is limited and they have few alternatives, they accept lower wages and harsher working conditions than men.[169]

I spent an afternoon in an UNRWA garment factory in a refugee camp chatting informally with the women working there. Four single women, all under 30, each sitting at one machine, work ten hours a day, six days a week for a female supervisor. The supervisor obtains material and patterns from a Palestinian businessman, who is a middleman (subcontractor) for an Israeli firm. The women are paid according to the number of pieces they produce. On a good day, they told me, they are able to complete six pieces. They are paid 3 shekels for each piece, or 18 shekels (approximately $5) on "good" days (about 400 shekels/$100 a month). The individual pieces sell in Israeli stores for 300 shekels/$75. The workers related that women employed in larger factories make more money—up to 500 shekels per month. However, it is considered much less respectable to work in such factories because men are present; because it requires travel; and because the transportation they would have to take (*serveece*) would be "mixed." Thus, for reasons of patriarchal honor, these women preferred to work for lower wages than they could earn elsewhere. My respondents nearly unanimously deemed working in factories "disreputable," which reflects the typical attitude in society.

The larger factories pay slightly higher salaries, and although society deems working in them dishonorable, employers are engaged in patriarchal bargains with workers' male guardians. According to Antoine Mansour and Blandine Destremau:

> One important aspect of the [unwritten] working agreement is the employer's commitment to protect the honor of his women employees; this being on the premises for the larger firms, and for the smaller ones from the time the women leave home until the time they return. In practical terms, this means that they are not placed in close contact with men while working, they are given an opportunity to pray, and they are often picked up by the employer himself or by someone in his family. This moral clause is an essential element in shaping the nature of the work environment for women, who constitute most of the workforce in this branch in the West Bank. A woman's honor is entrusted to her employer by her guardian (father or brother); it is

> to him the employer is committed and to him he must report—and to him he must complain if the woman misbehaves.[170]

The most striking aspect of such arrangements is that working conditions are established not on the basis of legal rights and obligations. Rather, they are a function of patriarchal relations and are based on the understanding that because the economic crisis is so bad, because the occupation is such a threat, and because employers and employees are in the same desperate situation, they have to cooperate to keep the factory running. The latter translates, in practice, to low salaries, ten- to twelve-hour workdays, six-day workweeks, lack of health and other benefits, and no vacation time. It is paternalism at its worst—illuminating a major "justification" for female oppression—and providing insight into the failure of the labor union movement in the West Bank, especially among women.[171] Data from a 1994 study demonstrate that only 17.2 percent of all female workers in both the West Bank and Gaza belonged to labor unions.[172] Women laboring in factories make little money, certainly not enough to give them any measure of independence, and in almost every case, they give their salaries to their families. They do not appear to have any more respect from, or decisionmaking input into, their families than nonworking women do.

## WOMEN AND THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Many West Bank camp and village women are engaged in remunerative economic activities that are rarely included in standard labor force surveys: specifically, in the "informal economy," which includes a wide variety of either home-based or street-based activities.[173] The informal economic sector is usually defined as comprising those areas of economic activity in which poor people are self-employed in marginal income-generating activities primarily to alleviate poverty. A definition of this sector applicable to the West Bank/Palestine context includes all those income-generating activities that fall outside the PCBS Census of Establishments and are predominantly home or street based. Because of the informality of the economic activities in this sector, it is the least measured labor market sphere and therefore the least understood. One notable aspect of women in the informal sector is that the economic activities in which they are engaged tend to complement their domestic roles. Women of all age categories are active in the informal sector but vary somewhat relating to type of work. For example, one study found that women over 40 tend to be engaged in peddling and vegetable cleaning, while women in their twenties tend to be more involved in home-based hairdressing and sewing. As would be expected, the educational level of most women in the informal sector tends to be low.[174]

Women predominate in the West Bank informal sector, constituting 55.6 percent of the workforce in this category.[175] There are five basic categories of informal labor: (1) plant production (such as growing and marketing herbs and vegetables); (2) husbandry, including raising poultry for egg or meat sale; (3) crafts; (4) household industries, including sewing, piecework for garment subcontractors, textile production, knitting, home food processing, hairdressing, vegetable cleaning, babysitting, house cleaning, cooking and catering, and the operation of in-house stores or kiosks; and (5) *bastat* (street peddling).[176] Because of the labor-absorptive capacities of the informal sector, it can sustain large numbers of workers but at very low levels of living. The strategy of the informal sector is geared toward maximizing earnings and minimizing the cost and level of overhead.[177]

The major problem for most women engaged in informal sector activities is acquiring the capital to start up (or maintain) a project.[178] Informal sector activities received a boost during the intifada after the Unified Leadership called for a boycott of Israeli products and a policy of economic self-reliance. Credit, always difficult for poor women to obtain, became relatively more accessible from both domestic sources (the various political factions) and international NGOs such as the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the Netherlands Organization for International Development Cooperation (NOVIB), and Save the Children. These groups set up "business credit centers" and "credit and loan centers" to provide women necessary capital. The primary focus of income-generating informal activities during the intifada was on women's cooperatives (operated inside or outside the household), home economy projects, and individual/neighborhood business projects. However, studies have shown that 80 percent of the informal projects initiated during the intifada have since failed.[179]

That astonishing failure rate is attributable to three major errors: (1) the credit agencies that loaned money did not provide the necessary ancillary training, marketing, financing, and other skills; (2) they took no account of the socioeconomic context within which the projects operated; and, (3) they prioritized the national issue over gender considerations—stressing the role of the income-generating projects from the perspective of promoting nationalism and developing the national economy, national self-reliance, and national resistance.[180] According to Nahla Abdo, none of the lending agencies, in their evaluations of projects for credit, "identified the relationship between structures of oppression in general and forms of oppression related to these undertakings. . . . There has never even been a definition of the concept of work."[181] A final point to be made here is that the informal sector is the most exploitative sector of the economy, and it is surely worth questioning why so much emphasis was placed on its development. I have alluded to the nature of the Palestinian economy in the context of a dependent, underdeveloped entity, reliant on unorgan-

ized and cheap labor. International NGOs perpetuated this situation by focusing their developmental efforts and resources on the informal sector. All activities in the home-based component of this sector conform to women's "natural" gender roles, and even if women are able to earn a decent living from such work, they are reinforcing traditional gender roles and responsibilities.

Nonetheless, it is useful to elaborate on the activities in the informal sector. Among respondents in this study, two women were part-time cleaners (in institutions); one had a kiosk; two did hairdressing at home; two produced embroidery for sale; three sewed at home; one knitted sweaters to market; and three processed olives for sale. None were involved in street-based activities.

### *House Cleaning*

A common household industry is house cleaning. While there is a strong social stigma attached to such labor—house cleaners are typically derogatorily called *khaddama* (servant)—it has become an important source of income for older married (and occasionally single), women. The key is older—most such workers are over 45. House cleaning has traditionally been considered "lower than" institutional cleaning, although that too is looked down upon. But in the past decade, with the deterioration of the economy and high male unemployment, house cleaning has become more widespread. Women engaged in such work can earn up to 100 shekels per day (about $25). Work in this area is steady, especially if the women are efficient and if they have regular customers. There is no capital investment, and although the work is hard, it is not as hard as vegetable cleaning, peddling, and other activities with lower profits and less stability.[182]

None of my respondents were engaged in this work, but I employed a cleaner from a village near Ramallah twice monthly. She was a 46-year-old "very observant" Muslim with thirteen children and no education; her husband had been unemployed for twelve years. She took a *serveece* to and from my apartment from her village. She arrived at 7:00 a.m. and worked until 2:00 p.m., taking only one short break to pray and have tea; she persistently refused my offers of longer breaks and food. Um Ali cleaned every floor, every window, and everything in between with tremendous energy and diligence. She had sufficient regular customers to work six days a week, and she proudly told me that she had enabled all thirteen children to complete *tawjihi* plus two-year diplomas.

### *A Kiosk*

The respondent who had a kiosk, a tiny closet-like structure that opened to the street from a room in her refugee camp house, was a most unassuming

woman. When I initially asked her if she worked, she replied, "No, I'm just a housewife." Later in our conversation, it emerged that her husband was forced to stop working because of severe diabetes; at the same time, her eldest son had a degenerative bone disease and was confined to a wheelchair, and one of her daughters required a major life-saving operation. It was then that she had the idea for the kiosk. Inside the house she knits sweaters and sews clothes (skills she learned in the camp's women's center) in a tiny workshop and then sells them in the kiosk. When I first talked with Um Muriad, the kiosk had only been open for six months but was already doing nicely. Two years later, it was flourishing to the extent that Um Muriad was able to purchase some items of clothing on credit from urban merchants. With the money she earns from this enterprise, Um Muriad puts food on the table and holds her family together. (She is 35, married with six children, educated through ninth grade, a camp resident, and a "very observant" Muslim.)

### *Home Hairdressing*

Another type of home-based activity in which women participate in the informal sector is hairdressing. Women working in this area usually need a certificate from a hairdressing school—typically a nine-month course. Two respondents were hairdressers; each village and camp has at least two women (some have more) employed in this work. It tends to attract younger women, both single and married. Most have dropped out of school before *tawjihi.* Home hairdressing is economically problematic because, although camp and village women only use very basic equipment (compared to urban, professional salons), there is nevertheless some capital investment required, plus the continuous need to purchase supplies. While most women enter this activity to help with difficult family financial situations, camp and village hairdressers rarely earn enough money to cover their own personal costs, much less enough to support their families. To a large extent this is due to the increasing impoverishment of the camps and villages, which does not allow a woman the luxury of paying another woman to do her hair regularly. And, in Muslim villages and camps, since most women now wear the *hijab,* they do not feel the need for regular hair care. It also appears that only women with ten or more years of experience tend to earn a good income from this work.[183]

Home hairdressing causes considerable inconvenience to families because of lack of space, customers appearing at inconvenient hours, and the like. Also, customers of home hairdressers tend not to value their labor and to believe that the cost should be far less than in salons. On the other hand, home hairdressing permits women to be employed and to be at home simultaneously. Such women can feel secure about their children, carry out their domestic responsibilities, avoid problems with husbands and society concerning free-

dom of movement, avoid problems with potential employers, and maintain some balance and flexibility in their lives.[184] One of the hairdressers related:

> *I took a course in hairdressing fifteen years ago at In Ash Al Usrah* [a charitable society in El Bireh], *and I've been working in my home ever since. But I'm not very busy; not many people take care of their hair anymore except for weddings and special occasions. After I left school I worked in a factory, but when I got married, my husband forbade me to continue. We were in a difficult financial situation from the start. That's why I took the course and started to work here in the house. My income helps a little, especially in the summer when there are many weddings, but I don't earn as much as I expected, or would like to earn. Plus it's expensive keeping up with the products.*
>
> —Deniz, 43, married with five children, village resident, "observant" Christian, completed tenth grade

### *Other Household Industries*

Other activities in the household sphere include washing vegetables, producing textiles and clothing, making handicrafts, knitting, sewing, preserving food, and preparing food (catering). These activities enable individual women to contribute to their family income while remaining inside their homes. Food processing, for example, involves women purchasing fresh fruits or vegetables in season from a local merchant, processing the product (simple procedures that require little equipment, although an initial capital investment may be needed), and marketing it. The last step is the most difficult. Women rarely have marketing strategies and tend to rely on informal marketing through neighbors, neighborhood stores, and family networks. Clearly this is not a highly dependable or profitable sector.[185]

Home cooking or catering can be quite profitable but is also sporadic. A neighbor (not a respondent), Nadia, was a village woman who had moved to Ramallah with her husband when he found a job in the city. She and her husband lived in a tiny, two-bedroom apartment with their two young sons and her mother-in-law. A "very observant" Christian, Nadia had *tawjihi* plus a two-year diploma and held a regular job as a kindergarten teacher. In addition, when requested, she supplied restaurants with large quantities of *sepaneyeh, safeeha,* and *za'arter* and *jebneh* pastries. To fill such orders she had to work all night for three or four nights in a row, in addition to teaching, cooking for her family, and minding her children. The income was good but the work quite difficult. Moreover, she occasionally received requests for large portions of *mussakhkhan, muftool,* or *mansaf* from private families who were having special gatherings. Since she prepared each of these traditional dishes from scratch, the labor was again intensive but the remuneration good. With the extra income Nadia earned from catering, plus her teachers' salary combined

with her husband's income, they were proudly able to send both sons to the expensive, private Friends School.

Vegetable washing, an activity in this sector, is done manually using traditional methods and requiring only sharp knives, sharp scissors, protective gloves, bowls, machines for cutting *molokhiah,* and sieves—equipment that most women typically have in their kitchens. The work is sporadic, but when a woman does receive an order, it is often huge and sometimes she will have orders from numerous clients on one day, then nothing for weeks. Camp women are often engaged in this activity given their proximity to urban areas. Older married women with the assistance of daughters typically do this work. It has the advantage of requiring little capital investment, with the exception of a refrigerator if the household does not have one. Studies have shown that virtually all women who engage in this work turn their earnings over to their husbands, though some would like to save money to buy a larger refrigerator or freezer. Unlike other types of work in the informal sector, most women engaged in vegetable cleaning hate their work.[186]

*Home-based textile and clothing production.* A major component of home-based work is the production of textiles and clothing. This activity is an outgrowth and subsector of the formal labor force subcontracting industry. In most cases, Palestinian mediators or subcontractors obtain material, deliver it to women's homes, pick up the finished product, and pay the women on a piecework basis. In some cases, women deal directly or indirectly (through Israeli drivers) with Israeli entrepreneurs. In other situations, they interact directly with Palestinian contractors. Women working at home in this industry must purchase sewing machines. They usually do this through either the subcontractor or the contractor (all of whom are men), paying for the equipment in installments that are deducted from the wages they earn for their piecework. Different types of machines are required for different types of sewing. Many successful home-based workers who have been working for a long time have as many as seven machines. The number of pieces a woman can complete in a day depends on the type of material she is working with, the number of machines she has, the amount of time she can spend, and the specific task. Any defect in the finished product means that the woman will not be paid for that piece.

It is difficult to estimate how much money women working in textiles at home earn per day or per month. Depending on the type of finished product, a woman can earn between $0.26 and $1.03 (U.S.) per piece. Most women who do such work give their earnings to their husbands or fathers (or brothers) as contributions to the family income. But widows who are heads-of-household usually dispose of what money they earn according to their own decisions. Working at home is convenient for women, especially those with families to care for, and it avoids the stigma attached to factory labor.[187]

### Bastat: *Street Peddling or Vending*

Street peddling, or vending, is socially acceptable work for older (over 45) married or widowed women. Most such women are extremely impoverished and usually either illiterate or semiliterate. Women engaged in such work typically sell only to women customers and get merchandise—women's and children's clothing, some household utensils, underwear, bedsheets and pillow covers, school uniforms—on credit from local merchants. They put small down payments on goods and pay back the merchants in installments. Usually, a woman needs about 200 shekels ($50) for an initial down payment to gain the confidence of a merchant. She might obtain that amount by selling her gold, borrowing from family members, or depleting her savings. Women peddlers work fourteen to sixteen hours a day in very harsh conditions. Market stalls, more accurately described as the least desirable spaces in the *suqs,* are generally open, exposed to the elements, massively overcrowded, and highly competitive. The average profit for a woman on her "best day of selling" is 20 shekels (about $5).[188]

* * *

Clearly, the gendered division of labor in West Bank camp and village society constructs and reproduces gender inequalities and the subordination of women. The patriarchal dimension of women in the labor sector hardly needs reiterating. Yet, women's problems in the labor market do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, the labor sector is buffeted by a host of external and internal forces and factors over which Palestinian women—and men—have little control. Women's choices are limited by the absence of a functioning state with all its associated benefits: an independent and accountable government; a healthy economy with a developing industrial sector; the rule of law and a legitimate judicial system; an adequate health care system; and a national educational system designed to serve the population's needs. The lack of all these combine with economic stagnation, unemployment, and political instability to make traditional norms powerfully seductive in the face of relentless despair and hopelessness about the future, and further restrict opportunities for women.

## NOTES

1. For the theoretical foundations of this analysis, see Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 162–165.

2. Khawla Shakhshir Sabri, *The Education System in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,* presented to UNCTAD, Geneva, June 1992, pp. 1–25; manuscript, Birzeit University.

3. Maria Holt, *Women in Contemporary Palestine: Between Old Conflicts and New Realities* (Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 1996), p. 69. Also see "Girls' Education: Realities and Challenges," Report of a Workshop, *Educational Network,* No. 18, September 1995, p. 9.

4. Ibtisam Abu-Duhou, "Schools in Palestine Under the Occupation and the Palestinian National Authority," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 3, no. 1 (Winter 1996), p. 16.

5. Abu-Duhou, "Schools in Palestine," p. 16.

6. In 1946, the ratio was thirty-five to forty students per teacher. Sabri, *The Education System in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,* p. 11.

7. UNDP, *At the Crossroads: Challenges and Choices for Palestinian Women in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip* (New York: Gender-in-Development Programme, UNDP, United Nations, 1994), p. 45.

8. Mona Ghali, *Education: A Gender Profile of the Determinants and Outcome of Schooling in the West Bank and Gaza Strip,* Palestinian Women: A Status Report, No. 6 (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, 1997), pp. 22–23.

9. UNDP, *At the Crossroads,* p. 48.

10. Rana Anani, "Violence in Schools," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), September 4, 1998, pp. 8–9.

11. Ibid., p. 8.

12. Ibid., p. 9.

13. Lamis Abu-Nahleh, *Gender Planning, Vocational Education, and Technical Training (VETT) in Palestine* (London: World University Service, in conjunction with the Women's Studies Department, Birzeit University, Palestine, 1996), states that in 1995, out of 1,086 academic schools in the West Bank, 491 were coeducational at the compulsory (ten years) and secondary cycle. These include 273 public, 66 UNRWA, and 71 private schools (p. 38).

14. Kitty Warnock, *Land Before Honor: Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), pp. 88–89, quoting Hala, one of Warnock's informants.

15. Abu-Nahleh, *Gender Planning,* p. 5.

16. Ibid., pp. 5, 10, 14–15.

17. Ibid., pp. 13–17, plus tables on pp. 152–158.

18. Ibid., pp. 11, 18–19.

19. Munir Fasheh, "Impact on Education," in Naseer Aruri, ed., *Occupation: Israel Over Palestine,* 2d ed. (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1989), p. 522.

20. Ibid., pp. 522–523.

21. *Economic Monitor* 1, no. 3 (June 1998): 40, citing the series of PCBS *Labor Force Surveys* (1995–1997).

22. See Nabil F. Khoury and Valentine M. Moghadam, eds., *Gender and Development in the Arab World: Women's Economic Participation—Patterns and Policies* (London: Zed Books, 1995), Annex: Table A.8, prepared by Valentine A. Moghadam, p. 185. Also see Nadia Hijab, *Womanpower: The Arab Debate on Women and Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

23. World Bank, *Developing the Occupied Territories: An Investment in Peace,* vol. 6, *Human Resources and Social Policy* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1993), pp.12–13.

24. Suha Hindiyeh-Mani, *Conditions of Female Wage Labor in Palestinian Factories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (East Jerusalem: Women's Studies Center, 1996), p. 13.

25. UNDP, *At the Crossroads,* p. 65; Rita Giacaman, "Palestinian Women in the Uprising: From Followers to Leaders," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1: 139–146.

26. Marianne Heiberg and Geir Ovensen et al., *Palestinian Society in Gaza, West Bank, and Arab Jerusalem: A Survey of Living Conditions* FAFO Report No. 151 (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Norwegian Institute of Applied Social Sciences 1994), pp. 150–151.

27. Ibid., pp. 140–141.

28. Ibid., pp. 148–151.

29. Ibid., pp. 141–142.

30. Ibid., pp. 143–144.

31. Ibid., pp. 145–146.

32. Rita Giacaman, "Health as a Social Construction: the Debate in the Occupied Territories," *Middle East Report* 19, no. 6 (November-December 1989): 16–19.

33. Majida Al-Bilbeisi, "Dire Need for Pre-Marriage Counselling," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), December 4, 1998, p. 12.

34. For a good general analysis of women's health care in the West Bank, see Ramzi Odeh, "Gender Discrimination in Health Care," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), May 15, 1998, p. 12. Also see Salwa Najjab, "Women's Health in Palestine: The Need for a Holistic Approach," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 2, no. 3 (1995): 43–47.

35. N. Toubia, A. Bahyeldin, and H. Abdel-Latif, *Arab Women: A Profile of Diversity and Change* (Cairo: Population Council, 1994), quoted in Ayesha Rifai Abu-Hwaij, *Policy Implications for Reproductive Health Care Delivery in the Rural West Bank* (London: World University Services, in conjunction with the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, 1996), p. 5.

36. Symptoms frequently reported by married women in Rita Giacaman, "Between the Physical and the Psychological: Women's Perceptions of Health in the Old City of Nablus," Birzeit University Department of Community and Public Health, 1994, pp. 26–52; manuscript.

37. Al-Bilbeisi, "Dire Need for Pre-Marriage Counselling," p. 12; she conducted the interview with Dr. Firyal Al-Banna.

38. Nadira Shalhoub Kevorkian, "Fear of Sexual Harassment: Palestine Adolescent Girls in the Intifada," in Ebba Augustin, ed., *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 172–179.

39. Meron Benvenisti with Ziad Abu-Zayed and Danny Rubinstein, *The West Bank Handbook: A Political Lexicon* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), p. 103.

40. Neve Gordon, "Palestinian Health Care: Neglect and Crisis," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 4, no. 2 (1997): 98.

41. See Meron Benvenisti, *1987 Report: Demographic, Economic, Legal, Social, and Political Developments in the West Bank* (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Base Project, 1987), pp. 30–32. See also Benvenisti with Abu-Zayed and Rubinstein, *West Bank Handbook,* pp. 202–204.

42. Benvenisti, *1987 Report,* p. 32.

43. Ibrahim Dakkak, *Palestine: Human Development Profile: 1996–1997* (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Human Development Project, Birzeit University, 1997), p. 63.

44. For two excellent analyses of this subject, see Elise G. Young, "A Feminist Politics of Health Care: The Case of Palestinian Women Under Israeli Occupation, 1979–1982," in Tamar Mayer, ed., *Women and the Israeli Occupation: The Politics of Change* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 182; and Simona Sharoni, "Homefront as Battlefield: Gender, Military Occupation, and Violence Against Women," in Mayer, ed., *Women and the Israeli Occupation,* pp. 121–137.

45. See, for example, James A. Graff, assisted by Mohamed Abdolell, *Palestinian Children and Israeli State Violence* (Toronto: Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation of Canada [NECEF], 1991), pp. 157–168; see also Al-Haq, *A Nation Under Siege: Annual Report on Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 1989* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Al-Haq, West Bank Affiliate, International Commission of Jurists, 1990), pp. 93–124.

46. For one woman's story of gas-related health problems, see Rania Atalla, "Enduring Intifada Injuries," *Middle East Report* 19, no. 6 (November-December, 1989): 18.

47. See, for example, Suha 'Adi, "Fifty-three Days' Curfew in Kufr Malik," in Ebba Augustin, ed., *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 131–141.

48. Gideon Levy, "The Dead Babies of Hebron," *Ha'aretz Week's End* (Jerusalem, Israeli weekly, English), September 4, 1998, p. B3.

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50. *B'Tselem Quarterly for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories* 1, no. 1 (December 1998): 24.

51. Hassouri, *Bulldozed into Cantons,* p. 2.

52. Ibid., pp. 2–29.

53. Ibid., p. 2.

54. Amnesty International, *Israel and the Occupied Territories: Demolition and Dispossession: The Destruction of Palestinian Homes* (New York: Amnesty International, December 1999), pp. i–ii, 42.

55. See, for example, Anna Bellisari, "Public Health and the Water Crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 2 (Winter 1994): 52–63; and Jad Isaac, "A Palestinian Perspective on the Water Crisis," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 5, no. 1 (1998): 54–58.

56. PASSIA, *Ten Years* (East Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 1999), p. 237. Two excellent articles in the Hebrew press dealing with the Israeli policies that cause severe water shortages for West Bank Palestinians are Amira Hass, "Dire Water Shortage in West Bank," *Ha'aretz* (Jerusalem, Israeli daily, English), July 27, 1998, p. 1; and Amira Hass, "Cut and Dried," *Ha'aretz, Week's End* (Jerusalem, Israeli weekly, English), July 31, 1998, p. B5.

57. Mustafa Bargouthi and Ibrahim Daibes, *Infrastructure and Health Services in the West Bank* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Health Development Information Project and World Health Organiztion, 1993), p. xii.

58. See David Kahan, *Agriculture and Water Resources in the West Bank and Gaza (1967–1987)* (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Base Project, 1987); and Aisling Byrne, *Water: The Red Line* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, 1994).

59. Amira Hass, "On the Water Front," *Ha'aretz* (Jerusalem, Israeli daily, English), June 21, 2000.

60. Assaf, "Environmental Problems Affecting Palestinian Women," p. 169. Also see Byrne, *Water: The Red Line;* and Isaac, "A Palestinian Perspective on the Water Crisis," pp. 54–58.

61. Assaf, "Environmental Problems Affecting Palestinian Women," p. 170.

62. Hass, "On the Water Front."

63. Violet Qumsieh, "The Environmental Impact of Jewish Settlements in the West Bank," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture* 5, no. 1 (1998): 34–35.

64. Assaf, "Environmental Problems Affecting Palestinian Women," p. 170.

65. Mustafa Barghouthi and Jean Lennock, *Health in Palestine: Potential and Challenges* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS), 1997), p. 6; Barghouthi and Daibes, *Infrastructure and Health Services in the West Bank,* p. xiii.

66. UNDP, *At the Crossroads,* p. 30.

67. Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine,* p. 5; Barghouthi and Daibes, *Infrastructure and Health Services,* p. xi; UNDP, *At the Crossroads,* pp. 29–30; PASSIA, *1998* (East Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, 1998), p. 230.

68. PASSIA, *1998,* p. 230.

69. This point is well made by Assaf, "Environmental Problems Affecting Palestinian Women," p. 169.

70. Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine*, pp. 5–6.

71. Assaf, "Environmental Problems Affecting Palestinian Women," p. 174.

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74. UNRWA, *Expanded Maternal Health Project: Survey of Iron Deficiency Anemia Among Pregnant Women in West Bank Refugee Camps* (Jerusalem: United Nations Relief and Works Agency, 1993), p. 3.

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78. Salim Tamari and Rita Giacaman, *Zbeidat: The Social Impact of Agricultural Technology on the Life of a Peasant Community in the Jordan Valley,* 2d ed. (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Community Health Center, Birzeit University, 1997), pp. 112–113.

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(Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Community Health Department, Birzeit University, 1980).

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81. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 17.

82. Rizkallah, *Nutritional Status of Primary School Children,* p. 21.

83. Rita Giacaman, S. Kan'aan, and Hala Salem, *A Training Needs Assessment for Women's Health in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Department of Community Health, Birzeit University, 1994); Giacaman, "Between the Physical and the Psychological."

84. Dakkak, *Palestine: Human Development Profile,* p. 58.

85. Islah Jad, Penny Johnson, and Rita Giacaman, "Population Policies in Palestine: Taking Women's Health and Rights into Account," *Policy Watch Bulletin* (HDIP Perspectives), No. 2, July 1998, pp. 11–12.

86. Interview with Rita Giacaman, director, Birzeit University Department of Community Health, Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine, May 20, 1999.

87. Jad, Johnson, and Giacaman, "Population Policies in Palestine," p. 11.

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89. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 20.

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93. World Bank, *Developing the Occupied Territories,* p. 17.

94. Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine,* p. 7, quoting The Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees, *An Overview of Health Conditions and Services in the Occupied Territories,* 1987.

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96. Quoted in Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine,* p. 7, from UNICEF, *The Situation of Palestinian Children in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (Jerusalem: United Nations Children's Fund, 1992). Also see Dakkak, *Palestine Human Development Profile,* p. 56.

97. PCBS, *The Demographic Survey in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Preliminary Report, March 1996* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996), p. 32.

98. Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine,* pp. 7–8.

99. PASSIA, *1998,* p. 227.

100. Ibid.

101. PCBS, *Gender and Health Care in Palestine* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1998), p. 1.

102. PASSIA, *1998,* p. 226.

103. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 6.

104. Ibid., p. 29, citing A. Tinker, P. Daly, C. Green, et al., *Women's Health and Nutrition: Making a Difference* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 1994).

105. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 6.

106. Ibid., p. 29.

107. PCBS, *Gender and Health,* p. 1.

108. Ibid.; also see *Social Monitor* 1, no. 1 (January 1998): 16.

109. *Social Monitor* 1, no. 1 (January 1998): 16.

110. PCBS, *Gender and Health,* p. 3.

111. GHSRC, *Palestinian Health Status Annual Report, 1995* (Gaza City, Gaza, Palestine: Gaza Health Services Research Center, 1996), pp. 21–22. For additional comments on maternal mortality (as well as infant mortality), see Rosina-Fawzia Al-Rawi, *Requirements for Gender Development in Palestinian Society* (East Jerusalem: Jerusalem Media and Communication Center, 1995), pp. 25–28.

112. Barghouthi and Daibes, *Infrastructure and Health Services,* pp. 119, 121, 123, 129.

113. Interview with Mahmoud Suleiman al-Titi, chief physician at the UNRWA Hebron Health Center, November 14, 1998, Hebron, West Bank, Palestine. All published reports at the time of this writing continued to state that UNRWA provided no family planning services. I cannot account for this discrepancy, but having seen firsthand the IUDs, pills, spermicides, and condoms, and having talked with the physician who supervises their distribution and the midwife who actually gives them to patients, I am compelled to report this.

114. Barghouthi and Daibes, *Infrastructure and Health Services,* p. 127.

115. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 26.

116. Ibid., p. 25. UNICEF cites the PA Ministry of Health for this figure, but it only pertains to the rural Hebron region and is therefore being theoretically extended to the entire rural West Bank. The north district is even more underdeveloped medically than the south, so the figure is logical there; but because the central region—Ramallah/El Bireh—has more facilities, it can be inferred that the percentage would be lower in the center.

117. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 25.

118. Abu-Hwaij, *Policy Implications for Reproductive Health Care.*

119. Ibid., pp. 52–59.

120. Z. Abdeen and F. Barghouthi, *Seventeen Years of Cancer Incidence 1976–1992* (Jerusalem: Palestinian Cancer Statistics, Al-Quds University, 1994), quoted in UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 21.

121. Heiberg and Ovensen, *Palestinian Society,* p. 103.

122. Barghouthi and Daibes, *Infrastructure and Health Services,* pp. xv–xxii, 295–297.

123. UNICEF, *The Health of the Palestinian Women,* p. 22.

124. Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine,* p. 8; World Bank, *Developing the Occupied Territories,* p. 17.

125. PASSIA, *1998,* p. 227.

126. Ibid., p. 248.

127. A recent study entitled "The Future of Women's Action in Local Councils" revealed that the overwhelming majority of local councils ignored the role of gender in local development, including health. Women were not beneficiaries of the councils except in projects relating to the household. Eighty-four percent of council projects—designed mainly by men—were described as "general" and only 7 percent as benefiting women directly (for example, constructing girls' schools). Seventy-seven percent of the projects did not include reference to women's development or women's needs in any area. In fact, women's opinions had not even been solicited for 91 percent of the projects. Nahla Abdo, "Gender and Politics Under the Palestinian Authority," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 43, quoting Nadir Sa'id, "The Future of Women's Action in Local Councils," *al-Siyyasa al-Filastiniyya* 4, no. 13 (Winter 1997): 6–33.

128. Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine,* p. 14. Additional information from interview with Samia Halileh at Arabcare, Ramallah, October 17, 1998.

129. Barghouthi and Lennock, *Health in Palestine,* p. 14.

130. Reported by Martin Rubenberg, M.D., internal medicine, oncology, hematology, in an unpublished report given to the Birzeit Community Health Department, derived from his weekly, yearlong, on-site clinic visits.

131. Christine M. Cervenak, "Promoting Inequality: Gender-Based Discrimination in UNRWA's Approach to Palestine Refugee Status," *Human Rights Quarterly* 16, no. 2 (May 1994): 300–374.

132. Ibid., pp. 309–310, citing UNRWA Information Paper No. 6.

133. Ibid., pp. 315–317.

134. Ibid., p. 317.

135. A good general analysis is Hind Kattan Salam, *Palestinian Women Today: Visible and Invisible Work,* Report Series No. 2 (Bethlehem, West Bank, Palestine: Bethlehem Business Development Center, Bethlehem University, 1993).

136. *Economic Monitor* 1, no. 3 (June 1998): 40, citing PCBS, Labor Force Survey, various issues.

137. An excellent study is Anita Vitullo, Hilmi Araj, and Nader Said, *Women and Work in Palestine* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Birzeit University Development Studies Program, 1998).

138. This is true for all countries. The greater the level of industrialization, the greater the female participation in the labor force. See Khoury and Moghadam, *Gender and Development in the Arab World.* Also see Helen I. Safa, ed., *Towards a Political Economy of Urbanization in Third World Countries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982).

139. Cheryl A. Rubenberg, "Twenty Years of Israeli Economic Policies in the West Bank and Gaza: Prologue to the Intifada," *Journal of Arab Affairs* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 28–73. See also Benvenisti with Abu-Zayed and Rubinstein, *West Bank Handbook,* p. 67; Meron Benvenisti, *1986 Report: Demographic, Economic, Legal, Social and Political Developments in the West Bank* (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Base Project, 1986), pp. 30–32; and Simcha Bahiri, *Industrialization in the West Bank and Gaza* (Jerusalem: West Bank Data Base Project, 1987).

140. *Economic Monitor* 1, no. 3 (June 1998): 9.

141. Ibid.

142. In these "cottage industries," 73 percent employ a maximum of five workers and 90 percent employ ten or less. PASSIA, *Ten Years,* p. 223.

143. For a comprehensive analysis of the Palestinian economy, see Radwan Shaban with Osama Hamed, and Ishac Diwan with Ali Khadr, *Development Under Adversity? The Palestinian Economy in Transition* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) and World Bank, 1997), manuscript. Also see Arie Arnon, Israel Luski, Avia Spivak, and Jimmy Weinblatt, eds., *The Palestinian Economy: Between Imposed Integration and Voluntary Separation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997). An excellent study focusing on women is Eleanor Abdella Doumato, "Economic Restructuring in the Middle East: Implications for Women," *Middle East Report* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 14–17.

144. See the many descriptions of the various kinds of women's work throughout Mary Eliza Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1862), for example, pp. 59, 75, 94–97.

145. This approach is taken by Rema Hammami, *Labor and Economy: Gender Segmentation in Palestinian Economic Life,* Palestinian Women: A Status Report, No. 4 (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, 1997).

146. This analysis has been explicated by Safa, *Towards a Political Economy of Urbanization in Third World Countries,* in her "Introduction," pp. 6–7, and is borne out in the various articles in her collection.

147. PCBS, *Labour Force Survey Report Series (No.7), Labour Force Survey: Main Findings (July–September 1997) Round, December 1997* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997), p. 59.

148. PCBS, *Survey of Wages and Work Hours—1994: Main Findings, December, 1995* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1995), p. 27; PCBS, *Labor Force Survey Report Series (No.7),* pp. 74–75.

149. Warnock, *Land Before Honor*, pp. 97–117, has gathered a number of very useful ethnographic accounts from women who underwent this experience. See also Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 1979), pp. 10–25.

150. Warnock, *Land Before Honor,* pp. 105–114.

151. PCBS, *Labor Force Survey Report Series (No.7),* p. 67.

152. Hammami, *Labor and Economy,* p. 20, cites PCBS April 1996 (draft publication).

153. Ibid., p. 19.

154. Ibid., p. 14, cites PCBS April 1996.

155. Ibid., pp. 12–17.

156. A good analysis with personal stories from women who have worked in Israel may be found in Annelies Moors, *Women, Property and Islam: Palestinian Experiences, 1920–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 177–189.

157. Ibid., pp. 183–184.

158. Ibid., pp. 177–182; Hammami, *Labor and Economy,* pp. 16–17.

159. UNDP, *At the Crossroads,* p. 66.

160. Hammami, *Labor and Economy,* p. 25.

161. Ibid., p. 25.

162. Ibid.

163. PCBS, *Education Statistics Series (No.3): Education Statistical Yearbook 1996/1997*, *June, 1997* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, 1997), pp. 105, 211, 227.

164. For an excellent analysis of Palestinian women and inheritance, see Moors, *Women, Property and Islam.*

165. Hammami, *Labor and Economy,* p. 23, citing PCBS 1994 Establishment Census (August 1995). This was out of print and unavailable to me.

166. Hammami, *Labor and Economy,* p. 21, citing PCBS, December 1996, pp. 42, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52; also PCBS, *Labor Force Survey Report Series (No.7),* pp. 55–57.

167. Moors, *Women, Property and Islam,* pp. 190–213.

168. An excellent recent study on subcontracting is Antoine Mansour and Blandine Destremau, *Palestine and Israel: Subcontracting Relations in the Garment Industry* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute, 1997).

169. Moors, *Women, Property and Islam,* pp. 190–213.

170. Mansour and Destremau, *Subcontracting Relations in the Garment Industry,* p. 57.

171. Suha Hindiyeh-Mani, *Conditions of Female Wage Labor in Palestinian Factories in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (A-Ram/East Jerusalem: Women's Studies Center, 1996); Mansour and Destremau, *Subcontracting Relations in the Garment Industry,* p. 57.

172. Hindiyeh-Mani, *Conditions of Female Wage Labor in Factories,* pp. 41–45, 72–73.

173. For a good comparative analysis of women in the informal sector, see Richard Lobban, ed., *Middle Eastern Women and the Invisible Economy* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

174. Hammami, *Labor and Economy,* pp. 13, 35–36.

175. Ibid., p. 14.

176. Four excellent studies of the informal sector are Gert de Bruijne, *Self-Employed Women in the Informal Economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A Joint Study About the Commercial Needs of Female Micro-entrepreneurs in the Occupied Palestinian Territories* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Affairs Committee [Nablus], Women's Affairs Committee [Gaza], Women's Studies Center [A-Ram/East Jerusalem], Bisan Center for Research and Development [Ramallah], Palestinian Agricultural Relief Committees [Ramallah] for NOVIB, Jerusalem Consultancy Office, 1994); Suha Hindiyeh-Mani, *Women and Men in the Informal Sector in the West Bank, Palestine: Home-Based Workers in the Textile Industry* (London: World University Service, in conjunction with the Women's Studies Center, Research Unit, A-Ram/East Jerusalem, 1996); Bisan Center, *Needs Assessment Report of Women in Micro and Small Scale Enterprises: West Bank and Gaza Strip,* draft submitted to the Center for Women's Economic Projects (CWEP), Oxfam-Quebec/OCSD (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Bisan Center for Research and Development, 1998); and Geir Ovensen, *Responding to Change: Trends in Palestinian Household Economy* FAFO Report No. 166 (Oslo: Jon S. Lahlum, Norwegian Institute for Applied Social Science, 1994.

177. Nahla Abdo, "Women and the Informal Economy in Palestine: A Feminist Critique," *Gender and Development,* Gender and Society: Working Paper No. 3 (Birzeit, West Bank, Palestine: Women's Studies Program, Birzeit University, 1995), pp. 37–38.

178. See, for example, the analysis by Izzat Abdul-Hadi and Jamileh Abu-Duhou, *Credit Needs in the Household Economy Projects* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Bisan Center for Research and Development, 1994), partnership project between NOVIB and Bisan Center for Research and Development.

179. See Abdo, "Women in the Informal Economy in Palestine," pp. 37–38.

180. Ibid., pp. 38–39.

181. Ibid., p. 39.

182. Moors, *Women, Property and Islam,* pp. 161–177.

183. de Bruijne, *Self-Employed Women in the Informal Sector,* pp. 1–15.

184. Ibid., pp. 16–29.

185. Ibid., pp. 77–100; UNDP, *At the Crossroads,* pp. 67–68.

186. de Bruijne, *Self-Employed Women in the Informal Economy,* pp. 1–15.

187. Hindiyeh-Mani, *Women and Men in the Informal Sector in the West Bank,* pp. 18–28, 30–38, 48, 24–38.

188. de Bruijne, *Self-Employed Women in the Informal Economy,* pp. 31–59.

# 7

# Women and Politics: Participation, Power, and Parity

Women's activism in the Palestinian Nationalist Movement (PNM) before, during, and since the intifada has been the subject of a considerable amount of literature. This scholarship has usually depicted Palestinian women as agents in the formation of women's unions and women's committees, as activists in the intifada, and as the only functioning aspect of civil society in the post-Oslo period.[1] The myriad of women's organizations in the West Bank gives an impression of mass political activism for women's interests. The four major women's committees or unions formed in the 1980s are theoretically popular movements. They appealed to women's interests such as unionizing working women, establishing kindergartens and child care centers, campaigning against illiteracy, and establishing training programs in sewing, knitting, and embroidery. In addition, there are a variety of women's NGOs that have emerged in the 1990s and are working specifically on women's issues. (Table 7.1 lists the major Palestinian political organizations; Table 7.2 lists organizations specifically for women.[2])

Recently, several prominent Palestinian intellectuals and former activists have written critically of the failure of the traditional women's movement to achieve any gains for women on issues of fundamental concern to women or even to have exercised agency in the nationalist movement.[3] Most of these self-critiques were not yet available when I began my research. Thus, informed by the dominant assumptions about women's role in the PNM, I was quite unprepared for the responses I received when I asked, "Have you ever participated in any women's groups or any political organizations?" The first surprise was that fewer than twenty women in my research community (of 175) admitted to participating in any manner in organized groups. Of these,

Table 7.1 Palestinian Political Organizations

| Organization Name | Year Founded/ Founder | Descriptive History |
|---|---|---|
| Fateh | 1959, by Yasser Arafat | Bourgeois, nationalist ideology. Largest and most influential organization in the PLO and, since 1994, in the PA (Palestine Authority). |
| Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) | 1964, by and as an appendage of the Arab League | Yasser Arafat became president in 1969 and transformed it into an independent Palestinian nationalist organization under whose umbrella all the major factions came together; Arafat, in his capacity as PLO chairman, was the architect of the 1993 Oslo Accords. |
| Palestine National Council (PNC) | | Legislative body of the PLO. |
| Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) | 1967, by George Habash | Pan-Arab nationalist, Marxist-Leninist; second to Fateh in terms of supporters; supports peace but not the Oslo Accords. |
| Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) | 1969, in a split from PFLP, by Nayef Hawatmeh | Marxist/Maoist; originator of the democratic secular state idea; supports peace but not the Oslo Accords. |
| Palestine Communist Party (PCP) | 1982 | Traditional Moscow-line communist party; eschewed guerrilla activities and implicitly (following Soviet policy) recognized Israel within the 1967 borders; transformed itself in 1991 to the PPP. |
| Unity Bloc | | Popular movement supportive of the DFLP. |
| Action Front | | Popular movement supportive of the PFLP. |
| Progressive Bloc | | Popular movement supportive of the PCP. |
| Youth Movement | | Popular movement supportive of Fateh. |
| General Federation of Trade Unions (GFTU) | | A formal trade union structure that incorporates West Bank trade unions according to Jordanian labor law. |
| Palestine Trade Union Federation (PTUF) | | The trade union arm of the PLO. |
| General Federation of Trade Unions–Workers' Unity Bloc (GFTU-WUB) | | Unionist arm of the Unity Bloc (DFLP). |
| Progressive Unionist Action Front (PUAF) | | Unionist arm of the Action Front (PFLP). |
| General Federation of Trade Unions–Progressive Workers' Bloc (GFTU-PWB) | | Unionist arm of the Progressive Bloc (PCP). |

*continues*

Table 7.1 continued

| Organization Name | Year Founded/ Founder | Descriptive History |
|---|---|---|
| General Federation of Trade Unions–Workers' Youth Movement (GFTU-WYM) | | Unionist arm of Fateh. |
| GFTU-Ghanem | | Separate GFTU comprising the PWB (PCP), the WUB (DFLP), the PUAF (PFLP), and the WVB (Vanguard Bloc-pro-Ba'athist); (1981–1985). |
| Palestine National Front (PNF) | 1973, in the West Bank | Semiclandestine local leadership; goal to mobilize support in the Occupied Territories for the PLO outside; suppressed by Israel. |
| National Guidance Committee (NGC) | 1978, pro-PLO intellectuals | Pro-PLO leadership committee founded in the Occupied Territories in 1978; operated openly in support of PLO; outlawed by the Israeli authorities; disappeared in the early 1980s. |
| Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) | 1988 | Founded in 1988; coalition of local West Bank and Gazan leaders from each of the four factions (Fateh, PFLP, DFLP, and the PCP) that organized and directed the intifada from "within." |
| Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) | 1988 | Political organ of the Muslim Brotherhood; supports the establishment of an Islamic state; opposes Oslo Accords. |
| Islamic Jihad | circa 1988–1989 | Militant Islamic fundamentalist organization; supports the establishment of an Islamic state in all of historic Palestine; active in guerrilla and terrorist activities; opposes Oslo Accords. |
| Oslo Accords | 1993 | Accord between PLO and Israel to create a semiautonomous Palestine Authority in parts of the West Bank and Gaza; supposedly the beginning of a peace process that would fulfill Palestinian nationalist aspirations. |
| Palestine People's Party (PPP) | 1991 (out of PCP) | Headed by Bashir Barghouti; nondoctrinaire, pragmatic, generally follows Fateh; supports the Oslo Accords. |
| Palestinian Democratic Union (FIDA) | 1991, in a split from the DFLP, by Yasser Abed Rabbo | Supports Fateh and Oslo Accords. |
| Palestine National Authority (PNA); or Palestine Authority (PA) | 1994 | Palestinian administrative body set up in small portions of the West Bank and Gaza (excluding East Jerusalem) as a consequence of the Oslo Accords. |

*Note:* The list is not exhaustive; see note 2 at end of chapter.

Table 7.2 Palestinian Women's Organizations

| Organization Name | Year Founded/ Founder | Descriptive History |
|---|---|---|
| General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW) | 1965, by the PLO | Founded as PLO's women's organization; banned by Jordan and Israel; remains active to the present; pro-Oslo; pro-Fateh. |
| Women's Work Committee (WWC) | 1978 | Nationalist/pro-DFLP; later renamed FPWAC. |
| Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees (UPWWC) | 1981 | Popular movement, Progressive Bloc (PCP). |
| Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC) | 1981 | Popular movement, Action Front (PFLP). |
| Union of Women's Committee for Social Work (WCSW) | 1982 | Popular movement, Youth Movement (Fateh). |
| Federation of Palestinian Women's Action Committee (FPWAC) | Founded in a 1989 reorganization of the WWC | Popular movement, Unity Bloc (DFLP). |
| Higher Women's Council (HWC) | 1988 | Coordinating committee of the four factions of the women's movement in the West Bank; changed its name to Unified Women's Council. |
| Unified Women's Council | 1989 | Established as a compromise with the GUPW, which objected to the original name as taking primacy over the GUPW (the official PLO union); lasted little more than a year before falling apart into factions. |
| Union of Voluntary Women's Societies | 1989 | Established as a bloc of charitable organizations to counter the Unified Women's Council, which was composed of women's committees only; disintegrated after the split in the Unified Women's Council. |
| Palestinian Women's Committees (PWC) | Post-Madrid | Pro-PFLP. |
| Women's Action Committees (WAC) | Post-Madrid | Pro-DFLP. |
| Palestinian Working Women Society (PWWS) | Post-Madrid | Originally pro-PPP, now includes other leftist factions and some independents; main office in Ramallah with other West Bank and Gaza branches. |

*continues*

Table 7.2 continued

| Organization Name | Year Founded/ Founder | Descriptive History |
|---|---|---|
| Union of Palestinian Women (UPW) | | Effort to unify Palestinian Women's Committees and Women's Action Committees. |
| Arab Women's Forum (AISHA) | | Palestinian branch of the Arab Women's Forum that grew out of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, c/o Women's Studies Center (WSC), A/Ram-East Jerusalem; Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling (WCLAC) is also a member. WSC and WCLAC are post-Oslo women's NGOs. |
| Women's Affairs Technical Committee (WATC) | 1992 | Nongovernmental organization that comprises the three women's committees that supported the Madrid Conference (Fateh, PPP, and FIDA), and various independent women; supports Oslo Accords; provides training and other activities aimed at increasing women's participation in society; together with GUPW held a conference aimed at adoption of the "Women's Charter/Declaration of Principles on Women's Rights." |
| Women's "Task Force Group" | 1992 | Established in response to a UNDP initiative by independent women and political groups that generally oppose Oslo but have no formal factional political affiliation. |
| Women's Affairs Center (WAC) | 1988 | (Nablus); research and advocacy. |
| Women's Studies Center (WSC) | 1989 | Research; leadership training. |
| Women's Studies Center, Birzeit University | 1990 | Research; publication of two series on women's issues—"Gender and Society" and "Palestinian Women: A Status Report" (10 issues). |
| The Women's Project of the Bisan Center for Research and Development | 1990 | Research; publication of work on women's issues by independent researchers; held a Women's Conference and published conference papers on women's issues emerging from intifada. |
| Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counselling (WCLAC) | 1991 | Research; legal advice, personal counseling, legal representation in court; hot line for domestic violence; Model Parliament. |
| Jerusalem Center for Women | 1994 | Palestinian-Israeli dialogue group; training and empowerment workshops; monitored women's participation in 1996 elections for Legislative Council and published results. |

two are atypical in that they are lifelong professional activists. One of these activists described a wholesale dwindling of interest in organized politics in her camp.

> *During the intifada, many women from my camp were active—some individually, some through women's committees. But today there is almost no activism of any sort. My camp has a population of nearly 9,000 and no more than fifty or sixty women are even members of women's committees today—of any of the factions; and no more than five or six of these are actually active.*
>
> —Ferial, 47, single, camp resident, religiously "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

The second surprise was that those few who had been affiliated with women's groups were overwhelmingly negative in describing their experiences. Those who had not participated were equally critical. It is important to note that camps and villages varied in their degree of activism during the intifada. In general, women's activism in a given locale depended on the amount of male activism. While some camps and villages were galvanized in vigorous resistance, others were virtually inactive. Again, I chose my locales randomly. Thus, while I did not intentionally select a locale based on its political activism, I believe the mixture of political participation among my locales is representative of the West Bank overall. This chapter presents respondents' explanations for their nonparticipation in organized groups, as well as their descriptions of the other kinds of activism they are now involved in, and an assessment of the implications of those choices for the future.

## AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: ALIENATION AND DISEMPOWERMENT

In my interviews, I asked as few direct questions as possible (aside from basic personal information), but I did specifically ask every woman if she had ever been involved in politics or in women's organizations. The reasons respondents gave for their nonparticipation or disillusionment with formal participation fall into three basic categories: concerns related to patriarchy, including honor and shame; frustration with the priorities of the existing organizations; and disillusionment with national politics altogether. An examination of these various reasons will bring into relief the enormous degree of alienation the majority of rural and camp women feel from their urban, activist sisters, belying common assumptions and raising the question of whether the chasm that apparently lies between them can ever be closed, or even narrowed.[4]

*Concerns Related to Patriarchy, Honor, and Shame*

The first category of reasons given for nonparticipation in politics has to do with patriarchy. In this category I group two types of issues: those having to do with fear for one's own personal reputation, and those related to the patriarchal nature and structure of the organizations themselves.

As we saw in Chapter 4, the power of *namima* in the camps and villages is so great that even the hint of dishonorable circumstances can ruin a girl's prospects for marriage. If socializing with first cousins in the presence of family is restricted, then demonstrating in a mob of young men is surely unthinkable. And families can react extremely harshly. During the intifada, many young women suffered very negative consequences, whether or not they actually got involved. Fifteen respondents stated that their early removals from school and teenage marriages were a direct consequence of their family's worries about their honor in the context of the intifada. (See Yasrin's story on page 137, Chapter 5.) A similar experience is related by a 24-year-old widow whose husband died of cancer two years after they were married:

> *I loved school. Till now I dream of going back. Once I participated in a demonstration and some people saw me and told my father. It was once, only one time I participated in a demonstration. But my father forced me to quit school. I regret leaving school very much and I blame my family for forcing me out of school and forcing me to family responsibilities at such a young age. . . . Of course I didn't want to marry at 16. No one would want to have to take on family responsibilities at such a young age.*
>
> —Yasmin, 24, widowed with one child, camp resident, "average" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Even when participation in activities was not disreputable, several respondents said that formal membership in a political or women's organization was.

> *I participated a great deal in the intifada. I made petrol bombs, I sewed flags and other banned materials, and I constantly participated in demonstrations and marches. I never belonged to any political party or women's committee. I didn't want the stigmatization.*
>
> —Rina, 34, married with one child, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi*

Maliki, a former village school headmistress, related:

> *I've been politically aware since 1947 when, on an errand for my father, I found myself caught up in a huge demonstration in Jerusalem. Later as a girl of 15, I defied my father and attended a large demonstration in Hebron where before all the people I read a nationalist poem I'd written about our*

*martyrs. I was always interested in politics and active in some way or another. During the intifada, I used to hide the* shabab [young boys] *who were wanted by the Israelis in my* [girls'] *school. The soldiers never dared come inside. . . . I've never been a member of any women's committee, although I sympathized with the UPWWC. I don't like to have even that known and I've never participated in any activity it organized. The parents of my students would have strongly objected if they had known their daughters' headmistress was a member of the Communist Party. I could have lost my job too.*

—Maliki, 63, married with five children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Rula demonstrates the fear of *iskat* that paralyzed so many females during the intifada:

*I was in school during the intifada and I participated once or twice in demonstrations. But, after that my parents prohibited me from participating in any other activities or even joining a women's committee. My family was very afraid of rumors—actually, so was I—there were so many around then about men abusing women. There were so many stories about collaborators and how they trapped women. I didn't want any bad talk about me.*

—Rula, 24, divorced for eight years with no children, village resident, "not observant" Muslim, completed tenth grade

Women who managed to break through the patriarchal restrictions in their own families and join organizations complained that all the shackles of patriarchy were simply replicated in these organizations.

*I belonged to the UPWWC for three months when I was at university, but I didn't like the elitism in it. . . . What my close friends who stayed with one of the women's unions longer have told me is that you can't say anything within the group—you can't express your ideas or opinions about anything. Whatever the elite leaders say, goes. And nobody can question them. If you're a cadre, you have to obey their orders. Actually it starts with the men in the political factions. Then they dictate to the women leaders in the committees who do what the men tell them. And then the female cadres must obey the female leaders. Just work and keep your mouth shut. It's all a big hierarchy beginning with the male elites. There is no equality, no democracy. The factions are unequal according to sex, class, position, age, etc. You have to be in the faction twenty years before anyone will even listen to you. I have friends who worked like crazy during the intifada—throwing stones, making and throwing molotov cocktails, demonstrating in the front lines, writing on walls, doing everything like the men. But in the end, no matter how hard they worked, how brave and courageous, they left the factions because the elite women treated them so badly. They didn't treat them with respect, they didn't even allow them to express their opinions.*

—Nabela, 43, married with one child, village resident, "completely away from religion" Christian, *tawjihi* plus three years at university

Another dimension of the problem is that the self/other dichotomy so apparent in West Bank kinship relations is transferred and replicated in the factionalized women's organizations. Nabela continues her observations.

> *It's the same with all the factions. I was so angry with this system. I hated it and I didn't want to be with any faction. The women are very selfish, very closed—competitive not cooperative—and they don't value you as an individual. They look at you according to your label—to which faction you are—and you are treated not as a person with contributions to make to the cause but only as a member of whatever union you belong to. And you are evaluated according to the faction—if someone is with the DFLP and you are with the CP or the PFLP, that person looks down on you. It's sort of like the* hamulah *system. You aren't evaluated for your individual worth but rather in terms of the standing or prestige (or lack of) of your clan. It works the same way with the political factions.*

Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson discuss the relationship between clan and political factions, stating that during the intifada, "political groupings [were] formed by virtue of family and clan relations. Indeed, they substitute[d] for the family and clan and . . . [were] tightly woven to exclude others from political or social interaction."[5] A camp resident confirms the family- or clan-based character of the nationalist movement and its women's groups.

> *Before Oslo, the women's committees were all linked with political factions, and if your family, especially your father or brothers—or, the married women, their husbands—were involved with a particular faction, you had to be affiliated with the same faction through its women's committee. It never happened that a woman joined a faction that was different from that of the males in her family. By itself, this is a very telling aspect of the failure of the women's movement to articulate a feminist agenda.*
>
> —Rita, 27, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

But the reach of patriarchy into Palestinian politics goes even deeper. Concepts about the masculine and feminine and practices and discourses pertaining to gender are central to the self-definition of all political groups, including nationalist movements, and they signal the political and cultural projects of such groups. In other words, nationalism, like all other political ideologies, is derived from its own social construction and is therefore gendered. Women's liberation, as Valentine Moghadam argues, far from being the automatic concomitant of national liberation, has been frequently regarded as inimical to the integrity and identity of a nationalist movement.[6] This point goes to the heart of women's experience in the Palestine national movement and helps explain why so few camp and village women participated in the

intifada. Significantly, Julie Peteet, writing in 1986 about the experiences of camp women in Lebanon at the height of organized resistance politics prior to the 1982 war, makes the same observation and prefigures the experience of West Bank camp and village women.

> The resistance leadership [female] was careful to avoid any actions by the women's movement that might cast the resistance in a role challenging patriarchal structures and authority. . . . In participating in the formal political sphere, women do challenge societal norms of proper female behavior. But the impact on gender relations does not include a radical transformation in the division of labor or in the bases of patriarchal control. . . . Participation in militant national politics. . .does not ensure any permanent and comprehensive sort of transformation. . .in challenging those patriarchal structures and ideologies that confirm and legitimize women's assignment to the domestic sector. . . . Mobilization devoid of ideologies and prospects for gender equality may further institutionalize women's association with the domestic sector by infusing it now with national, patriotic meanings.[7]

The dominant organization in Palestinian nationalism has been Fateh, headed since 1964 by Yasser Arafat. Its origins, organization, and ideology are firmly grounded in a conservative, petit bourgeoisie, nationalist ideology that has had as its sole objective the "liberation" of Palestine. Most of the founding fathers, including Arafat, had their roots in the Muslim Brotherhood. Fateh never articulated a social program, much less a women's agenda. Organizationally, it was a classic reproduction of the traditional family, with Arafat as the archtypical patriarch or "father of the nation."[8] Moreover, the major leftist strains within the nationalist movement—the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine—while claiming to be Marxist, socialist, and committed to the "woman question"—have been as traditional and conservative as has Fateh in terms of gender issues. Each had its own patriarch—George Habash and Nayef Hawatmeh—installed in a tightly hierarchical organizational structure. And although both paid lip service to feminist liberation, it never amounted to more than empty slogans. Thus, while the intifada created a new discursive and practical space in which Palestinian women might have asserted their own agency, the strength and resilience of traditional gender hierarchies and discourses closed this space quite quickly.[9]

In addition, most of the activities in which rural and camp women participated during the intifada were essentially extensions of traditional gender roles. These included, for example, visiting families and attending funerals of martyrs, sheltering *shabab,* treating the wounded, providing alternative education when schools were closed, establishing kindergartens, planting victory gardens, knitting sweaters for prisoners, demonstrating for prisoners' release, and standing up to soldiers in the streets to protect their sons. This is not meant

to infer that these activities were unimportant; indeed, the intifada could not have sustained itself without this supportive backdrop. It is rather to highlight the fact that even for camp and village women who did participate, their activities did not entail transformations in gender roles, relations, or power hierarchies. Here too Peteet's observations concerning "mass work" by camp women in Lebanon are similar: "Mass work is carried out in ways that do not fundamentally deviate from women's traditional [roles] . . . [it] did not prompt the formation of a women's movement ready to confront patriarchy. . . . Palestinian women's political activism has often been an extension of their domestic roles. . . . Women's reproductive roles have been politicized too."[10] Moreover, even within the women's committees in the West Bank camps and villages, urban women were the decisionmakers, project initiators, and leaders. Local women were merely followers.

Joseph Massad has detailed and analyzed the gendered narratives and mobilizing metaphors in Palestinian nationalist thought. He begins with a deconstruction of the Palestine National Charter, proceeds through major declarations of Chairman Arafat and the many communiqués issued by the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) during the intifada. Space permits but a cursory review of his comprehensive analysis. Massad argues that the naturalization of the nationalist movement began with the signification of the Zionist conquest as "a rape of the land," Palestinians as "the children of Palestine," and Palestine as "mother." He asserts, however, that while women remained the metaphorical "mother," the "rape" "disqualified" women from the *legal* reproduction of Palestinians. This assertion is reflected in the fact that Palestinian identity, as codified in the National Charter (Articles 4 and 5), is defined as "a genuine, inherent and eternal trait and is transmitted from *fathers to sons,*" and "Palestinians are those Arab citizens who used to reside . . . in Palestine until 1947 . . . and everyone who is born of an Arab Palestinian *father* after this date—whether inside or outside of Palestine." Thus, in Massad's words, "liberation is staged as a transaction between men over the honor of a woman-mother whose ownership passes through paternity . . . [and] territory was replaced by paternity." The role of women then "becomes secondary and supportive in the narrative of nationalism."[11] (Emphasis added)

The November 1988 Palestinian Declaration of Independence describes women as being "the guardian of our survival and our lives, the guardian of our perennial flame." Massad illuminates, in quotes from the communiqués of the UNLU, the ways in which Palestinian women are represented as guardians of Palestinian survival. For example, in Communiqué No. 29, "The Call of the Wedding of the Palestinian Independent State," which celebrates the declaration of independence, the UNLU congratulates women in their role as mothers. It extols "the mother of the martyr and her celebratory ululations, for she has ululated twice, the day her son went to fight and was martyred, and the

day the state was declared." Moreover, Massad points out that while in Communiqué No. 5 women are described as the *manabit* (soil), a later communiqué describes the Palestinian people as "the makers of glory, respect and dignity," and he argues that this discrepancy is central to the concept of Palestinian nationalist agents as masculine. Men actively create glory, respect, and dignity, but women are merely the soil that nourishes these attributes along with nurturing manhood.[12]

Massad also demonstrates that it is overwhelmingly in their social roles as mothers (for example, when their sons are imprisoned or are martyred) or in their reproductive capacity (for example, when they miscarry as a consequence of exposure to tear gas) that women are mentioned at all in the communiqués. In short, Massad argues that the Palestinian national agent is masculine, bourgeois, independent, autonomous, young, and male.[13] In this context, I vividly remember my conversation with a Palestinian health worker in a Lebanese refugee camp prior to the 1982 war. When I inquired why birth control methods were unavailable in the camps' clinics, she replied: "We need mothers to produce as many children as possible for the revolution." When I asked why she had only three children (she was in her mid-thirties), she responded, "Those who can afford to pay for services from Lebanese physicians and clinics have access to birth control." This not only highlights the politicization of women's reproductive role in the nationalist discourse; it also clearly illuminates the inherent class bias in the nationalist movement. Additionally, it sheds insight into why UNRWA clinics provided no birth control assistance until the limited introduction of such services in 1994.

Some respondents who were active in politics echoed the view that women's essential role was to produce, support, and "nourish" men. Karma became active in politics as a young girl through the Fateh Youth Movement, participated in the WCSW, was active throughout the intifada, and was elected to the first Palestinian Legislative Council. Nevertheless, on women's participation during the intifada, she commented:

> *Some women actively participated in the struggle through politics but all participated just by being here, by remaining on the land. Because the life for men is so difficult, the most important way women participate is by supporting them. Women really aren't expected to be politically active. The role of woman is much more to be a wife and mother, to give comfort and support to the men in her family. Women have to cope with the deaths and imprisonment of their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons—they must be very strong. Many women participated in demonstrations to show support for the men. A few women were organized—actually from the early 1980s—in women's committees and women's unions, but they too really worked in support of the male factions with which they were affiliated.*
>
> —Karma, 32, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, B.A.

Thus, it appears that women who embraced formal participation internalized the prevalent gendered notions of politics and worked within them. Those who eschewed such notions either did not join or dropped out, disillusioned. Indeed, as Islah Jad, Birzeit University academician, reflecting on the women's committees writes, "In the women's publications we find no mention of the laws that govern women's status in society, or of the traditional values that still reinforce the tribal and patriarchal culture."[14]

### *Women's Groups and Women's Issues*

Flowing directly from the previous set of reasons for nonparticipation in organized politics is the second set, which revolves around disillusionment with the women's organizations because they have not done anything to advance the cause of women. Specifically, because men prioritized the national question and "told" women to subordinate their interests to the national program (a proposition women accepted), a coherent feminist agenda that engaged women on the basis of women's needs and interests was never articulated. Therefore, many women who did participate in the women's committees became disenchanted while others accepted that the national question should be prioritized. Some comments from the disenchanted follow.

> *You asked why the women's committees failed to address women's issues. Well, it's like I told you, the women leaders just did what the men told them. And basically they told them to forget about women's problems, we have to solve the national question first. Your job is to support the nationalist movement not to be thinking about what women want. So that's it. The men dictated and the women followed. I never respected the women's unions for putting aside women's concerns. Maybe that's the real reason I couldn't stomach them.*
>
> —Nabela, 43, married with one child, village resident, "completely away from religion" Christian, *tawjihi* plus three years at university

> *I was active during the whole time of the intifada. Actually, I was active before. When I was 13, I joined the WWC. Then while I was at university, I joined the UPWWC. I was really active with them. I was arrested once and held in prison for three days and then I was under house arrest for nine months. I lost a whole year of education. . . .Now, I don't participate in any women's groups. I'm committed to struggling for women's rights, but I believe that if I want to work for women's rights it shouldn't be through a committee. I don't believe in their work anymore. I have a strong sense that these women's groups are only raising empty slogans. They say we want to do this and that, but they end up doing nothing. They don't even do anything to change their personal relations at home. At least I am talking about the women in my committee—I've seen them up close at home, and*

*their relations with their husbands aren't any better than my mother's and father's.*

—Bissan, 23, single, village resident, "not believing" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

*Before and during the intifada I was very active in the Women's Committee for Social Work* [WCSW/Fateh]. *I was especially active in the prisoners committee and I participated in all the demonstrations and activities on behalf of the prisoners. I'm not active in the WCSW or any other organizations anymore—these groups are not as good as they were when they first began. They've become very politicized. For example, the Fateh women's committee will only take care of, support, or deal with Fateh women. I think this is wrong. Also, they've become more interested in acquiring money than in providing services or human development. I don't like this either. A women's committee should be helping women—all women. . . . In general things have changed in the village. None of the women's groups are active here now. In part, this is because of the changes in the groups themselves, but it's also because the village has become more conservative and women who leave their homes for any reason are watched very closely. Plus, most women are discouraged from their experiences with the women's committees in the past and not really interested. For those few of us who are, we really can't move now or organize freely. I'd like to see a genuine women's organization develop here—one that is really interested in the problems of women—but that doesn't seem likely to happen.*

—Um Abed, 38, married with five children, village resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed sixth grade

*I was an active member of the Women's Work Committee* [WWC] *for one year. I had worked in a factory before I married and I was impressed with their program to improve working conditions for women. You can't imagine how bad it was for women in factories. But then they seemed more interested in nationalist politics than in doing something concrete for women, so I quit. I've never been involved in any women's groups since. Even during the intifada I didn't participate. . . . I believe in women's rights—I've strongly supported my daughters going to university and joining the professions—but I don't see what the women's committees have or can do for women.*

—Um Aissam, 47, married with nine children, village resident, "not believing much in religion" Muslim, completed ninth grade

Comments follow from several respondents who accepted the prioritization of the national question.

*During the intifada, I was a member of the WCSW. I was an active member—I used to visit injured people, prisoners' and martyrs' families, participate in demonstrations and strikes—everything. I was very active and I was very strong. I stood up to the soldiers and sometimes I got boys away from*

*them. When I was active in the women's committee, it was all politics. There were never any women's issues raised or discussed. I don't think it ever occurred to us.*

—Um Hussein, 47, married with 13 children, village resident, "observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

Ferial became active in the early 1970s. In the early 1980s, she was placed under administrative detention for more than a month. Subsequently, she was placed under town arrest and forbidden to travel. Later she spent another eighteen months in prison in administrative detention. Today she works in an official capacity in the PA. A lifelong political activist and professional working woman, she agreed that women's issues must be subordinated to the nationalist cause.

*Although the PA is accepting women in government and is supportive of women, I feel deep-down, that this is merely rhetoric—to please women, co-opt them and keep them quiet. But having said that, we as women can't demand or expect too much at this time. We don't have a state, we don't control our own land or water resources, we don't have borders or external security, we don't control our own economy so we can't plan for our own economic development, and we have very few internal resources. I think we have to be patient.*

—Ferial, 47, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Several of the most involved political activists concede that the women's organizations have not championed women's causes. Analyzing the work of the women's committees in 1990, Zahira Kamal, a long-time activist leader in the WWC/FPWAC and now general director of Gender Planning and Development in the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation in the PA, observed:

> We do not have a feminist movement. . . . The women's movement is a national one. The women involved in it are motivated primarily by national interest. . . . The development of the women's cadres in 1978 [WWC] was a clear departure . . . however the cadres became mere ornaments for different political groups, and political considerations began to take precedence over feminist concerns. . . . Palestinian women are prisoners of a concept of "women and the intifada." The emphasis on women's involvement in the national struggle has come about at the expense of all their other work.[15]

Rita Giacaman, another feminist activist who was one of the founders of the WWC, a leading FPWAC activist, and presently directs the Birzeit University Community Health Department, commented similarly:

> The women's committees movement did not succeed in placing issues of concern to women and women's status in society . . . on the national agenda, it did not fundamentally challenge the division of labor based on gender that is at the core of women's oppression in Palestinian society today.[16]

Ironically, the intifada actually intensified this tendency of women's organizations to fit themselves under the existing national political infrastructure. In instinctive response to the outbreak of the intifada, and throughout its first year, many rural village and refugee camp women spontaneously and intensely participated in intifada-related activities. However, the women's committees quickly assessed the intifada as an opportune moment for political mobilization and worked to channel the grassroots energy into political factions.[17] Prior to the intifada, the women's committees had been more loosely connected to the political factions, but with its eruption they became completely integrated. The women's groups directly followed the orders of the male factional leaders. There were no women in leadership positions, although a few women such as Zahira Kamal and Siham Barghouthi made decisions for their faction (the DFLP) when all the male leaders were in prison. Moreover, the women's committees received all their financing to carry out their political work from their affiliated factions. From this strong coalition of party factions and women's committees came the emergence of "popular committees" and "neighborhood committees."[18]

As a result, the women's committees became vast bureaucratic structures, implementing programs (even down to the details of how to administer them) dictated to them by the male factional leaders.[19] Moreover, executing the programs required full-time womanpower—both administrators and cadres—and the committees now had large budgets, provided by the leaders of each faction out of its budget allotment from the PLO, with which to carry out their work. This brought about another transition: women who had previously worked as volunteers now received salaries for their efforts. According to Islah Jad,

> The phenomenon of increased institutionalization led to a tendency on the part of some committees to substitute internal relations of a voluntary, democratic type for ones that were centralized and businesslike; to substitute volunteers with employees; to become increasingly dependent on running offices with expensive equipment; and to rely on big budgets instead of human resources as the basis of the work. . . . This led to an increased intervention of the political parties in the women's programs. In some cases, it was the political parties who ordered establishment of more kindergartens. . . . Also, the [women's] committees were ordered to continue programs which had been created from the initial needs stemming from the uprising, but which did not correspond to the changing reality which occurred with the passage of time.[20]

It could be argued that given the political exigencies of the intifada, it was logical and necessary for the women's groups to set aside gender issues in the context of struggle for the common national cause. Occupation and resistance after all, affect the whole nation—both men and women. However, as noted, women's issues were not the paramount concerns of the women's committees to begin with, and the intifada only deepened this situation.

Another common theme expressed by respondents was that of resentment on the part of rural and camp women toward the "urban elite" women who came in and wanted to run everything their own way. They were perceived as wanting all the power and decisionmaking authority without being willing to pay any of the "struggle" price of really being on the front lines. Janeen joined the WWC when she was 16 and working in a sewing factory in her village, where women were "extremely oppressed." Women's wages were meager and lower than men's. The hours were long, the work tedious. She was attracted to the WWC because they promised to help women organize to end discrimination and improve working conditions. She was active in the WWC for six years, including through the first year of the intifada; then she stopped participating altogether because "the elite women were using us for their interests," doing "nothing to help us with our problems," and "I began to feel very humiliated."

> *The women who came from Ramallah were more interested in their factions and getting more members to join, than in the issues. For example, we used to go to the Red Cross to have demonstrations in support of the prisoners, and these women would shout "I brought ten," "I brought twelve," and so on. This wasn't what the demonstrations were supposed to be about. Many women in my village were very active during the beginning of the intifada but they didn't want to be labeled with a faction. The more they saw of the factions the more they dropped out of political activity altogether. . . . I was very active during the first year of the intifada. I believed that I, as a political woman and a village woman, had to go to all the demonstrations, sit-ins, and strikes. I went to Ramallah and Jerusalem dozens of times that year. Some of the elite women went to the demonstrations but they were never in the front lines. Also, I know for a fact that there was a budget to cover the cost of transportation for village women traveling to demonstrate in other places. But when I traveled, I always paid for my transportation myself. No one ever offered to pay. Yet, I am a poor woman and I sacrificed to go. I know that some of the urban women—not all of them, but some—simply put the money in their pockets. . . . Some of the factions had more money to spend than others. Fateh women had enormous budgets, but the WWC didn't have much. . . . Factions collected money on the outside* [in foreign countries] *to support children of poor families—if the father was martyred or in prison. But the poor people never got the money. The people who got it didn't need it.*[21] *. . . At one point, I raised the idea of starting a kindergarten. They said, "Yes. Yes, it's a good idea, do it." But then they began to tell me what to do, how to do it—as if I, a village woman, couldn't think for myself.*

*But I ran around, did what they told me, then when I asked for a little money to rent a room to get the project started, they said no. "We don't have any money for that." That was the end of the kindergarten project. Later some women from another committee came here from the city with money and started a kindergarten by themselves. They ran it. But you should have seen the place. The roof leaked, the windows were broken. The kids froze in the winter. But they seemed to think it was good enough for village children. I'm sure none of their kids went to schools with conditions like that. . . . Finally, people like me just gave up.*

—Janeen, 33, married with two children, village resident, "average" Muslim, completed ninth grade

A further comment by Janeen on the elitism and discrimination village women experienced during the intifada is found on p. 57, Chapter 3.

These views are echoed by Nabela, who has been politically aware all her life, but chose to remain politically unaffiliated, except for the short period when she was at university and joined the UPWWC. She talked about women's issues and political groups at length**.** Though not actually a member of any women's committee, she has been in a position to observe them closely through her friends, her work, and her long-standing commitment to women's issues and interest in politics.

*I've always been interested in politics—from the time I was a girl at home. My father was passionately interested in politics and though not formally educated, he read a lot and knew about politics not just in Palestine but all over the world, and he always talked with me about these things. When I got older, I became interested in women's issues. When I was at university, I joined a women's union that was affiliated with the Communist Party but I quit after a month or so. I've never belonged to any group since. I'm close to their way of thinking—at least in rhetoric if not in practice. The CP and its women's union* [UPWWC] *are just as elitist as every other faction—maybe more so because so many of them are intellectuals and professors. I couldn't stand the attitudes and the elitism of the union's* [female] *leaders, the hierarchy in the union, the petty in-fighting. And, they didn't make me feel at all welcome—I wasn't one of the insiders. . . . During the intifada the UPWWC tried really hard to recruit me but I refused. So did the UPWC. Both pursued me strongly and consistently. I didn't join either because I knew the minute I'm inside, I'll just be a silent worker cadre who has to keep my mouth shut. And I knew I couldn't do that. It's not in my nature not to think independently, not to question. I can't just blindly and silently accept directions.*

—Nabela, 43, married with one child, village resident, "completely away from religion" Christian, *tawjihi* plus three years at university

Camp and village women talk about politics, women's organizations, and political participation with a dismissive cynicism as the purview of "those"

[urban women] who "always looked down on us and treated us as inferiors, anyway." This situation is a consequence of the fact that camp and village women did not generally evoke their own participation, nor did they choose the moment and the context of their involvement. In most cases, they were subjects of mobilization, a mass that was welded into followers. Also, those who were active prior to the intifada or who initially responded spontaneously to the exigencies of the uprising were subsequently persuaded by the women leaders to channel their activities through women's committees. As such, camp and village women's interests were subordinated to factional interests and to the national question. As noted above, women typically joined the faction their brothers, fathers, or husbands belonged to, and women's politics never reached a point of differentiation from kin and communal relations. Moreover—at least among the women in my research community—there were far fewer politically active camp and village women during the intifada than is commonly assumed.[22]

In sum, elite women determined the context of political activities both before and during the intifada and chose to follow the direction of male political leaders who insisted that the "national issue" had to be resolved before women's concerns could be addressed. Indeed, the single most compromising factor in the women's movement has been that although women were mobilized through women's organizations, those organizations were essentially appendages to the main political factions in the national struggle, which had no interest in addressing gender questions, including even the most basic needs of women.[23] The leftist women's factions debated the merits of a women's agenda at the elite level, but while there was an emerging feminist consciousness among these elements, there was never any feminist action. At a certain point, these "politicized women," with their new understanding of gender inequity and female oppression, wanted to confront their male colleagues, but they were too weak and factionalized to defend their positions. Nevertheless, nothing of these debates filtered down to the villages and camps.

This gap between the urban, active women and their rural and camp sisters has actually widened since the intifada into a chasm. Even highly publicized efforts, such as the conference organized by the WATC and GUPW to adopt a Declaration of Principles of Women's Rights in February 1994 or the Palestinian Model Parliament on Women and Legislation held in March 1998,[24] neither included nor reached rural or camp women. Moreover, the latter engendered a strong Islamist backlash that the women's groups never systematically countered.[25] I was present at the Model Parliament and can attest, firsthand, that among the 100 or so attendees, there were no women from the rural villages and no more than a handful from the nearby camps. Indeed, only a few of my respondents were even aware of the Model Parliament. Of those,

no more than five or six saw it in a positive light. Dismissal or even deep suspicion was more typical. One respondent, a twelfth-grader, stated:

> *I think the situation of Palestinian women is not all that bad. But I think women have to follow the Islamic religion and be good Muslims. If they were good Muslims they wouldn't be holding this parliament. It is really being organized by Christian women who are telling Muslim women to stop wearing their scarves and Islamic dress. Our religious teachers at school told us all about this, and told us we should not allow these Christian women to take away our religion. . . . I don't know where these Christian women are from, or even if they are Arabs. I didn't ask. Our religious teachers told us to stand up strongly to these women and react hard against them. We shouldn't allow them to come here to our camp to speak. If they come, we have to talk louder than they do and tell them we are good Muslims and we take our religion seriously. . . . No, they didn't tell us exactly who these groups or individual women were, just that they are a very big threat. . . . Yes, of course I believe my teachers. I'm a good Muslim and a good student.*
>
> —Abla, 17, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, in twelfth grade

### *Disillusionment with Politics and the Political Struggle*

Beyond the specific criticisms leveled at women's organizations, a widespread disillusionment with politics in general, and the Oslo Accords in particular, pervaded my research community. With the virtually complete disintegration of politics at any level after the coming of the Palestine Authority, the women's groups in the camps and villages also decomposed and became completely irrelevant, in considerable measure because they had no independent women's agenda. Women in the camps and villages were left with no organizational structure, no leadership (long since usurped by the urban elites), and no established program around which to mobilize. The narrowing of the boundaries of permissible political debate in Palestinian politics, combined with the PA's reinstitution of kin structures and kin relations, also acted to shift women's location and definition of their activities away from the public arena and back to the private domain of home, family, and clan.[26] Most of the rural and camp women I interviewed had either extricated themselves from organized politics or were trying to make an impact in other ways.

> *During the intifada I was very politically active through the women's committee affiliated with the Popular Front. I participated in every possible way. But after the Oslo Accords and all these changes brought about by the so-called peace process—especially the weakening of all the political parties except Fateh, I began to change my attitude. As Palestinian women we had a very simple dream—not to go back to 1948—but to have at least the whole of the West Bank. Now if you want to go from Ramallah to Nablus, there are*

*so many checkpoints and problems—it's worse than before the intifada. . . . As Palestinian women under the Palestine Authority, we don't have any real rights. . . . Now I am focusing all my energy on women's social issues and how to address them through the women's center here in the camp. Actually, most of the women who were previously politically active are now either doing nothing or are working on women's social issues.*

—Rita, 27, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus B.A.

*I have been a member of the women's committee associated with the Democratic Front since I was 20. I am still a member, but after Oslo I don't see any purpose in the women's committees. They can't make any difference on the political level and they're not really that committed to women's issues. I don't participate in the committee anymore; now I focus on the women's center here in the camp. I believe we have to make women's issues our priority and I think the center can do much to help women.*

—Soraya, 28, single, camp resident, "average" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Rita and Soraya are unique in that they have transformed their disillusionment with traditional politics and women's groups into grassroots activism on behalf of women by establishing and directing the women's center in Al-Amari camp.

## WOMEN'S ACTIVISM WITHIN MY RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Urban political activists in the post-Oslo era turned their attention to the formation of NGOs that focus on research, lobbying, and leadership training. The most prominent of these include the Women's Studies Center at Birzeit University, the Women's Center for Legal Aid and Counseling, the Women's Studies Center, the Jerusalem Center for Women, the Women's Project of the Bisan Center for Research and Development, and the Women's Affairs Technical Committee.[27] Yet, there is an even greater distance between these groups and camp and village women than there had been between their political committee predecessors and rural and refugee women. Nevertheless, while the majority of my respondents were generally unenthusiastic about organized women's groups and national politics, a number of women in my research community were turning in two other organizational directions to try and improve their lives. One was toward Islam and fundamentalism; the other was toward a more local brand of activism through individual women's centers that work on social issues. In the remainder of this chapter, I present the voices of respondents who were active in these two areas.

### *The Muslim Sisters*

To a considerable extent, the growth of Islamism in the West Bank—both among men and women—can be explained by the failure of the intifada to produce anything resembling a just political settlement, compounded by the suffering the people endured during the uprising. It is also a result of worsening economic circumstances and increasing poverty. There is despair, frustration, disillusionment, alienation, and hopelessness throughout society. That a return to religion would have appeal in such an environment is self-evident.[28]

By the second year of the intifada, Israel had banned all popular committees, including those of the women. The intifada was beginning to lose momentum as the people began to feel that they were making enormous sacrifices and accomplishing little. The political factions had lost much of their original unity and were quarreling over both strategy and tactics. Families of rural and village women increasingly restricted the freedom of their daughters, sisters, and wives to participate—even to leave their homes. Girls as young as 13 and 14 were taken out of school and married off as soon as someone asked for their hand.

The Islamist movement (in particular, Hamas) opportunistically inserted itself into this environment—initially in Gaza and later in the West Bank—providing support services and relief to the local population and assuming increasing influence in the national debate. They argued that Israel was winning the struggle because Palestinians had abandoned their traditions and their religion, and that only a return to Islam could bring about a Palestinian victory. They focused their attack on women and began a campaign to force women to wear the *hijab* (or, better, the *jilbaab*), to segregate themselves from men, and to stay at home. At the same time, the Islamic clergy issued continuous calls for men to practice polygamy as a way of "protecting" society.[29] Unveiled women were harassed and often stoned by young men, and the nationalist factions took little notice. "Leftist and non-religious men started to urge their women to wear head scarves to avoid problems in the streets. Some other nationalist groups, in particular Fateh, participated in the *hijab* campaign as an intifada activity."[30] The secular nationalist leaders assured women that the new veiling was a temporary arrangement and that, after liberation, women too would be free.[31] Such assurance, however, was purely political rhetoric. Indeed, not until a year and a half after the *hijab* campaign began did the UNLU (in leaflet No. 43) condemn it. Moreover, this denunciation was primarily the result of the UNLU's recognition (after all Gazan women and a growing majority of West Bank women were veiled) that the fundamentalist groups were undermining *their* political interests. Also, only after the UNLU's comments did the Higher Council for Women, a forum of the four West Bank women's committees, issue a statement denouncing the campaign.

While the leadership's statements stopped the verbal and physical violence to which women had been subjected if they failed to cover their heads, they were incapable of reversing the overall effect of the campaign, which, in Palestinian activist and academic Rema Hammami's words, "had already succeeded in positioning women's dress and behavior as appropriate subjects of political discipline, or as sites for the reproduction of the social and, ultimately, the physical integrity of the intifada."[32]

By mid-1999, evidence of the intensifying religious conservatism and fundamentalism was everywhere: within the government, among public opinion, in university student council elections, and in the prominence of the Muslim Sisters.[33] It seemed likely that Sharia would become the basis of personal status law. The executive had constituted a committee of nine male jurists to reconcile Jordanian and Egyptian Islamic codification into a single Palestinian code, and there was every indication that the legislature would institutionalize Sharia as the basis of family law. Karma, a member of the Legislative Council, comments:

> *If we want, for instance, to deal with the problem of early marriage, we have to examine the causes. Islam is not the cause. Rather it is a problem of modernity. According to Sharia, a girl cannot marry before 15 and she cannot be legally married without her consent. The problem here is not the law rather its application. Some families fabricate their daughter's birth date to make her appear in court older than she is. And even some judges collaborate in this. If a girl is 13 or 14 and looks older, it's easy for her father to fabricate her age. . . . When we talk about law this is a problem. We are a Palestinian society and we want to have democracy for all the people and all the religions. We want a democratic society and a democratic polity. But, in fact, 97 percent of people here are Muslim, and in this case we have Sharia law and Sharia courts. The problem is not Sharia. The problem is the people who do not follow Sharia or who follow an incorrect interpretation of Sharia. The real question is, how can we prevent violations of Sharia? . . . Actually, I support 15 as the minimum marriage age for girls. I look at girls in Western society at this age* [15], *and while it's true that they don't marry, they are very active sexually and often have children even without marriage. So to me this means that 15 is a perfectly acceptable age for marriage.*
>
> —Karma, 32, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, B.A.

Moreover, a March 1999 public opinion poll undertaken by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC), demonstrated the widespread desire of the population to live under Sharia.[34] In the West Bank, 761 people were randomly surveyed in face-to-face interviews in their homes. The homes and the subjects inside the home were also randomly selected. In answer to the question "In the case of the establishment of a Palestinian state, do you think the state should be run according to Islamic law or according to secular

nonreligious law?" the results were that *77.5 percent wanted to live under Islamic law; 18.7 percent wanted to live under secular law, and 3.8 percent had no answer.*[35] In addition, in March 1999, a coalition of Islamic parties (Hamas and Islamic Jihad) swept student council elections at Birzeit and Hebron universities.[36] Yet, contradicting most analysts concerning the *political* dimensions of the increasing adherence to Islam, analyst Sara Roy persuasively argues that this trend must be understood in a *cultural* context.

> In the current [1998–2000] context of the West Bank and Gaza . . . popular alienation from politics is pronounced and political ideology has little place . . . political Islam holds little appeal and military attacks by Islamic extremists are extremely unpopular. . . . In fact, cultural practice and religion seem to be gaining prominence in Palestinian life because culture and religion are the only belief systems left upon which Palestinians can depend . . . people are not turning to religion in greater numbers or becoming more devout. Instead they seek greater comfort in *practicing* Islam. . . . The goal [of the Islamic movement] is not the creation of an Islamic society so much as the building of a society that is more Islamic, a society imbued with Islamic values . . . as the basis for growth and progress. . . . The Islamic movement is creating a discourse of empowerment and is doing so by spreading Islamic values without violence through good example, namely through the provision of social and community services.[37] (Emphasis in original)

It is in this context that the growing influence of the Muslim Sisters (*al-akhawat al-muslimat*)—sometimes referred to as "Islamist feminists"—must be understood.[38] They are organized throughout the West Bank in the camps, villages, towns, and cities. They are informally "affiliated" with Hamas but are not a part of that organization.[39] It is impossible to accurately estimate their strength within the general population; however, if it were compared to Hamas, the Muslim Sisters would have considerable support. Even if they are completely disassociated from Hamas, they are highly influential because of the example of self-empowerment they provide oppressed women. My judgment is that their active membership is relatively small but that they enjoy wide support among women in the camps and villages. Whatever their actual numerical strength, their importance resides in their public visibility combined with their articulation of an Islamic solution to women's oppression under traditional patriarchal social norms.

The emergence of the Muslim Sisters in the West Bank reflects an attempt by observant women to demonstrate their capacity for agency through the development of Islamic solutions to women's social problems. Their articulation of women's rights in Islam is, in part, a reaction to the urban, secular, feminist organizations that they perceive as anti-Islamic and "Westernized."[40] More important, however, is their conviction that Islam is *not* the source of their oppression. Rather, they believe that their subjugation results from men's

appropriation ("reading" or interpretation) of Islamic texts and men's misrepresentation of the Word of God (the *Quran*) and of the prophet Muhammad's examples and teachings.[41] They also believe that the influence of the West has perverted indigenous social relations, resulting in a "quasi-modern" neopatriarchal society in which the egalitarian message of the *Quran* has been corrupted. In particular, Islamist feminists argue that spatial segregation and seclusion of women has been exacerbated as a result of the long historical and hostile encounters between Muslim societies and an imperialistic West. For example, to "protect" their women from Western decadence, Muslim men subjected them to excessive and "un-Islamic" immurement.[42]

The Muslim Sisters in the West Bank descend from the original Muslim Sisters founded in Egypt in 1936 by Zaynab al-Ghazali.[43] From the beginning they were influenced by the Muslim Brothers, also founded in Egypt, in 1928, by Hasan al-Banna. The first Muslim Sisters held beliefs very close to those expressed by the women I interviewed. Commenting on the beliefs of the early group, Leila Ahmed writes:

> On polygamy, for example, they . . . argu[ed] that to treat all wives precisely equally, as the Quran stipulated, was exceedingly difficult, hence the problems that polygamy engendered led to violations of other directives in the Quran associating marriage with love, kindness and mercy. Similarly, they held that divorce was, as a hadith declared, "the most hateful to God of all things"; people abused the practice because they had fallen away from the true Islam. The answer was not "to abolish what is permitted" but to return to the fundamentals of Islam.[44]

Earlier in the same book, Ahmed writes:

> The unmistakable presence of an ethical egalitarianism [in Islam] explains why Muslim women frequently insist, often inexplicably to non-Muslims, that Islam is not sexist. They hear and read in its sacred text, justly and legitimately, a different message from that heard by the makers and enforcers of orthodox, androcentric Islam.[45]

Indeed, many feminist Islamic scholars, not necessarily Muslim Sisters, argue that the earliest revelations the Prophet received in Medina between 622 and 627–628 C.E. reflect the original democratic, spiritual, and social equality between men and women that Islam embodies.[46] Certainly, the perspectives of and the arguments made by the Muslim Sisters deserve to be heard.[47]

In my research community, the Muslim Sisters are, in general, well educated, professionally employed, and, most important, highly observable in public space. They have far greater freedom of movement than do most other camp and village women. Their identity as Muslim Sisters appears to give

them the self-confidence to move freely outside the domestic realm without fearing gossip or rumors. In the following, I present some of the voices in my research community who identified themselves as Muslim Sisters to illuminate how they see themselves, what their situation is as women, and what they are doing to change their social condition.

Zahra is typical of the Muslim Sisters I spoke with. She is attractive, animated, and articulate. She has been employed at a women's center in a refugee camp for six years as a sewing teacher. Her previous teaching job required travel to other cities and villages. Her family never objected to her traveling to work in these places. She also stated that she visits friends frequently in large cities. In addition, Zahra volunteers with handicapped children at the women's center and stated that she participates in mixed (male and female) councils dealing with problems of the handicapped. She has traveled alone to Amman for conferences and goes frequently to Ramallah for meetings. She stated, "Many men have come for my hand," but she has chosen not to marry "because I don't think any man will tolerate my way of life—my independence, my work and my freedom—and I'm not going to give that up." (See Zahra's comments on being a single woman on pages 113–114, Chapter 4.) On the social problems facing Palestinian women and the need for an Islamic solution, Zahra stated:

> *Women have so many problems here I don't know where to begin. The occupation and the extreme poverty we face affect women in every way. For example, in living conditions—having to live in the same house with their in-laws creates endless problems. And, health care for women is terrible. We don't have any facilities and the physicians are poorly trained. Women are herded through the clinic like cattle when they go. Also, too many—far too many—girls leave school, or are forced out by their parents and forced into early marriages—it's really a tragedy. There's an enormous amount of violence against women and women are totally constrained. They have no freedom of movement—they don't even have the right to express their opinions. . . . Of course, these aren't only economic problems, they are social too. Our traditions and culture have become stronger than religion, and women suffer for this. I think the solution resides in teaching parents how to bring up their children correctly. It's very hard to change the attitudes of adults who have already been thoroughly socialized, but we need to reach the children and this must start in the home. Women need to get out of the confines of their houses—not against their husband's will for something frivolous—but to learn skills and develop their self-esteem and character. If a woman comes here* [the women's center in the camp] *and takes a sewing class, she will not only learn a skill but she will learn things that will help her change herself and bring up her children in a better way; she will even be able to deal with her husband on a more equal footing. . . . The real solution however is that the people need to come back to Islam. Islam gives women all their rights. If we follow the instructions of Sharia in the correct way, women will have all their rights and they won't have to face all these problems. My*

*religion gives me the strength to follow the life I've chosen.* [Here she quoted a long passage from the Quran.] *The solution for women lies in Islam. If we live by the real religion, the religion the Prophet taught, our lives will be fine. We will be free. For example, take the problem of violence against women. I don't believe men have a right to beat women under any circumstances. The Quran sanctions violence against a woman only in the case of sexual betrayal—then she may be beaten—but that is an extremely rare occurrence and certainly not the cause of the widespread violence here. Except for that reason, Sharia doesn't allow men to beat their wives. Muhammad never hit any of his wives and he constantly preached against violence toward women. If a man is a true Muslim, he should live by the Prophet's example and the law of Sharia. That would eliminate the problem of violence. Sharia doesn't permit women to be married without their consent and it gives them the right to education and to work. . . .*

*I am totally against polygamy. Sharia allows it but only on the condition—and this is a very big condition—that men treat their wives fairly and equally in all ways. And since no man can be equally fair in all things, he can't have more than one wife. This is not picking and choosing, it is following Sharia laws completely and precisely—not just selecting one part that suits men.*

—Zahra, 35, single, camp resident, Muslim Sister, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

Mirna works part-time at a women's center as a sewing instructor. Her husband is an unskilled laborer who works in both the West Bank and Israel. She spoke about the importance of the women's center to her personally, women's problems, and the Islamic solution.

*When I was a little girl, I used to come to the center to read and play sports. There aren't any activities for children in the camp, but this center had activities and it was a "women's place" so I felt safe. My father never objected because only women could come here. I still believe it is an important place for women because they can come and discuss their problems and not worry about gossip. When we meet here, we talk about our problems, we exchange experiences, we give our opinions, and we try to help women. For example, if a woman wants to come to the center to take a sewing course and her husband forbids it, we first sit with her and help her formulate an appropriate discussion with her husband about the benefits and positive aspects of the center. If that doesn't work and she can't convince him, then we will go and sit with him and try to help him understand the importance of her coming. . . . I began wearing the Islamic dress at 16. It was entirely my choice; actually my father objected and my sister didn't put it on till she was 30. But I deeply feel that Islam provides everything that we need to lead good lives. In the Muslim Sisters, I found other women who think like me. . . .Women's problems—there are so many. I think ignorance is the biggest. After that, the problems are too many children and too much control by their husbands. Women need to get education and skills they can use in the workplace, they need good jobs, and to be more equal with men. . . . The ignorance is from*

*both men and women. For example, an ignorant man will be more controlling with his wife—he won't treat her as a human being. He'll just dominate her. And if she's ignorant too, she'll just go along. One problem in this regard is family planning. Men here want too many children—they expect one every year. They don't understand what constant pregnancy does to a woman's health and they don't think about the economic costs of having children—education and things like that. Men actually prohibit women from using birth control and women feel they can't do anything about it. That's what I mean by ignorance. We need to educate men and women about these things. . . . I don't believe the government has any role to play in such matters. Secular laws would be useless. We have to bring people back to Islam, the true Islam, not the one that's been distorted by men over the centuries to serve them. Islam gives women the right to education, the right to work, the right to take part in public life, the right to say no to marriage, the right to inherit and own businesses. Why don't we have these rights today? Because we are so far away from religion. Don't let anyone tell you the problems women face here are because of religion. Sharia isn't the problem; it's the ignorance of the people and our traditions. I believe that if we had an Islamic state and lived by the true laws of religion, women would have everything.*

—Mirna, 26, married with one child and pregnant,
camp resident, Muslim Sister, *tawjihi*

Iqbal, a volunteer at a women's center in a camp, has never worked outside the home. She would like to but feels that she would be "discriminated" against in the workplace because she wears the *jilbaab* and covers her face. Admittedly, when we were first introduced, I felt intimidated by her total enshroudment. Nevertheless, as we talked, she removed her face cover and I found her engaging, intelligent, and witty. (See Iqbal's comments on traditional norms on page 48, Chapter 3.) On the importance of the women's center and Islam to her, she related:

*I'm a member of the center and it's important to me as a woman because it fills up my time—it takes at least half of my free time. I think meeting other women and exchanging experiences is a great aspect of this center. It has helped me develop self-confidence and feel better about myself. That's why I come. . . . I don't think Palestinian women have any rights whatsoever. In terms of education, freedom of movement, work—we have no rights in any area of life. I believe women should have the right to live as human beings with dignity, to be able to express their opinions, to complete as much education as they are capable of, and to be able to have informed consent in choosing their husbands. . . . Why we don't take our rights? It's simple. The men here are traditional, conservative, and ignorant. Too many people in this society say that women don't take their rights because of religion, but I don't agree. We shouldn't use religion as a place to hang all our problems. Islam gives women all their rights—the right to education, to work, to have a say in their marriage. If we look into the history of Islam, we see so many women who worked and participated in public life. It's the conservative men who use religion as a reason for not allowing women to go out of the house*

*or finish their education or whatever. But this is not what religion says. It's a distortion of religion. For example, male dominance—that's a big problem here. But that's not the way it should be. For me as a good Muslim, a Muslim Sister, I'm following the prophet Muhammad's instructions and modeling. He was very good to his wives and daughters. He was never conservative or strict with them about anything. . . . The traditional norms in our society are the biggest problem women have to face. Everything is prohibited and shameful. We have to educate the people about the true meaning of religion. The Quran says men and women have equal dignity and equal worth. We have to construct a real Islamic society that reflects these norms. We have to model our lives on the life of the Prophet. We have to change the way we socialize our children.*

—Iqbal, 32, married with five children, camp resident, Muslim Sister, completed tenth grade

Inji worked as a secretary for seven years; she is now unemployed and looking for work. She is doing volunteer work at a women's center in a refugee camp. She too sees society's problems clearly and finds the solution in a return to Islam.

*As girls growing up, my father treated us the same as the boys. He insisted that we all finish our education even though he had no education and worked in a vegetable stand. He never discriminated between us—my sisters and I were allowed to play with boys in the neighborhood as if we were boys ourselves. I still play with boys! Seriously, just because I'm a Muslim Sister doesn't mean I can't interact with men, socialize with them, work with them. Of course I can. It's a matter of keeping my morals beyond reproach. Men have come for my hand, but I never liked any of them and my father never forced me. If I do marry, I expect to meet a man and get to know him before I agree to marry him. And if I get married, I want to have twelve children—all girls. I love girls. Well, maybe not twelve, but I do want only girls. . . . Women face many problems here. The economic situation makes life very difficult and the social situation is even worse. But I believe the two are related. If families had enough money I think they would educate their girls as well as their sons. Still, there is so much discrimination against women. Everything is forbidden. We have lists of forbidden things. It's forbidden to go out of the house, it's forbidden to see friends, it's forbidden to continue education, it's forbidden to work, and on and on. . . . The problem is that women lack consciousness of their rights. Islam gives women all their rights and women must be strong enough to stand up and take them. Women have to have strong characters and self-respect and know what their rights are. Too many women don't even know they have rights. . . . I think the most important thing for women is to read the Quran themselves. Not listen to what men tell them the Quran says. All their rights are in the Quran but women think they need men to interpret the Quran for them. They don't. And especially because men have distorted the Quran to serve their own interests, women must read and interpret it themselves. This center should hold lectures and seminars about women's rights and make a real effort to get women to come to the center. They can learn skills here, develop their char-*

*acters, read the Quran and learn to think for themselves. Religion is about political and community belonging. We don't need the PA and, certainly, we don't need secular laws. We need to reestablish an Islamic community like Muhammad had in Medina.*

—Inji, 34, single, camp resident, Muslim Sister, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

In the context of West Bank camp and village society, the analyses and convictions of the Muslim Sisters appear progressive—even revolutionary. These women are, by any definition, agents. More important, their ideas resonate with the women in my research community in a way that the proposals of the urban activists never have. Unfortunately, the PA has subjected the Muslim Sisters (as it has the members of Hamas) to harassment, arrest, detention without trial, and other severe measures in an effort, encouraged and supported by the United States and Israel, to eliminate the Islamists from the political landscape of Palestinian politics.

I returned to the West Bank in December 1999 to reinterview some of my respondents; in particular, I wanted to learn more about the Muslim Sisters. I found that several of the women I had initially interviewed had been arrested, and others were being subject to constant surveillance and persecution. Most evidenced fear and intimidation; some were reluctant to reopen their discussions with me; and a few denied having told me they were Muslim Sisters when we first talked. Nevertheless, they continue their activism, albeit cautiously.

### *The Grassroots Democratization Efforts of Women's Centers*

The other significant direction in which women in my research community were working was through women's centers in the refugee camps. While there are women's centers in all the refugee camps as well as in Halhoul village, only a few have thought-out programs for improving women's situations.

*Balata camp women's center.* This center was established in 1975 by UNRWA, but it is now self-sustaining. Its board contains members from all the political factions. It was originally directed by secular women and was known to have been a strong center of activism during the intifada. By the late 1990s, the majority of visible women—directing, teaching, and participating in activities or courses—were Islamist. The center has had a program for eliminating illiteracy since it began. Today it operates a variety of training courses, including sewing, embroidery, hairdressing and beauty, knitting, curtain making, flower arranging, and the production of baby furniture (cribs, bassinets), baby clothing, and blanket sets. There is a sports center although there are no organized sports. But if a few girls want to play basketball, for example, there is a private area where they can play without being observed from the street. Partic-

ipation at present is low—approximately sixty members—out of a camp population of 8,904.[48]

*Aroub camp women's center.* This center was created only in 1996 after several years of lobbying by camp women. UNRWA purchased an old dilapidated school building and offered it to the women. It has two training courses—in sewing and embroidery—and operates a kindergarten. There are no other activities.

*Halhoul village women's center.* This center was established in 1965. Today, it is funded in part by the Welfare Association and in part from fees charged for services. Compared to the centers in the refugee camps, its buildings, equipment and services are highly developed. From its inception its sole mission has been to provide health and educational services to village women. It boasts a medical clinic that includes prenatal care and other medical services, as well as a dental clinic. It offers courses in health education for new mothers, sewing, and knitting. There are four kindergarten classes, two classes for deaf/mute children, and a library with 4,000 books. It employs fifteen women. It does not, however, engage in any gender-related consciousness-raising programs, lectures, or courses. On the other hand, Halhoul is one of the few villages in the West Bank that has such a facility.

*Al-Am'ari camp women's center.* This center was established in 1993 under UNRWA auspices and with funding from the German government. (The camp has had a men's center since 1985.) A specially built three-story building houses the center, including a sports facility. There are eight salaried employees. The center provides vocational training in embroidery, sewing, knitting, weaving, ceramics, photography, and other "occasional" courses. It has a nursery and a kindergarten, provides tutorials for students who are having difficulty in school, and offers counseling services, including "home visits." It has a *dabkeh* group, sponsors a summer camp, and regularly invites professionals from outside the camp to give lectures on a variety of gender-related subjects. Perhaps most important, the center provides a space, described by one woman as "sacred space," where women can come together informally, in a socially safe environment, share their problems, and interact with other women outside their families. The center serves approximately sixty women per day; however, no more than 20 percent of the camp's women come to the center at all. Of those who do come for training courses, about half are married and half are single.

Most important, the Al-Am'ari center is engaged in a grassroots democratization movement that provides a potential model for democratization elsewhere. It takes into consideration the strong cultural preference for "individ-

ual" solutions while simultaneously empowering women to have the self-confidence, awareness, and will to approach their husbands and struggle to transform relations within the home. At the same time, the center is respectful of the Islamic character of society without *being* Islamic. The women's center has no political affiliation, although, as noted, its codirectors—Rita and Soraya—were politically active before and during the intifada. However, after the Oslo Accords and the establishment of the PA, both women decided to eschew political activism for social work on women's issues. The women's center does have some affiliations with women's committees but "strictly on our terms and initiative. They cannot come to the center unless we invite them or approve a project they offer." The center has an executive committee, and two of its members participate (after a very difficult three-year struggle with the men) on the executive committee of the men's center. The two centers have jointly sponsored several "mixed" activities—for example, a communal dinner to break the fast during Ramadan and sports activities during summer camps. (See Rita's comment on page 122, and Soraya's on page 136, Chapter 5.)

The directors of this center feel passionately about their work there. Soraya stated that the priorities for women must be the eradication of poverty and the elimination of ignorance. Regarding the latter, she remarked:

> *I don't mean this* [ignorance] *with respect just to level of education—it applies to everything. For example, we held a lecture here at the center a few weeks ago on AIDS. Practically all the husbands of the women in this camp who are working work in Israel, and they have many opportunities for easy sex. The men can get the disease and bring it home to their wives. Yet the women here thought that this lecture was ridiculous and irrelevant; they didn't see why they should be bothered with such information. Very few women attended the lecture and those who did basically dismissed it. Another example is the fact that because so few mothers in the camp are educated themselves, they don't understand the importance of education for their daughters. They insist their daughters ignore their homework and instead help with the household chores. Worse, they agree to take the girl out of school and marry her off. School dropouts and early marriage are the biggest problems for girls. Somehow, we have to change the attitudes of these mothers so their daughters have a chance for a better life than they have. . . . Another issue that really bothers me is sex education. Almost everybody agrees that there is a need for sex education because women know absolutely nothing when they get married. But when we tried to have a lecture on the need for sex education, the whole camp was in an uproar. They thought such a lecture was outrageous—in the end we didn't have it. But it's this kind of general ignorance that really concerns me. I think it's a cultural phenomenon, deep in our upbringing and traditions. Everything is shameful and forbidden. I'll give you an example. My brother is very educated and has lived and worked in New Zealand for fifteen years. He has a master's degree and works at the embassy there. When one of his daughters told him that she was taking a course in sex education, he went to the school and demanded that*

*they cease teaching it. So, really I don't know what we can expect from the simple people here. But I believe that we have to find a way to change this kind of ignorance. You know, women here are even ignorant of their basic human rights. For example, take the issue of the elections for the Legislative Council in 1996. There has been a lot of propaganda about the large number of women who voted. But the truth is, in most cases, at least here in the camp, men took their women to the polls and told them how to vote then bragged about how liberated they were as men for allowing their wives to vote. And the women didn't even understand.*

—Soraya

Rita explained how she thought it would be possible to bring about change.

*If we want to change women's condition, we have to change society as a whole. For example, if the economic situation in general improved, women's lives would improve in terms of finishing school, not being forced to marriage too young, better health care, more employment opportunities. If the economic situation was better, many more girls would be able to finish their education and go to university. Most families here in the camp can't even afford the cost of tuition, uniforms, and books for their daughters' secondary education. But even if there is economic improvement, we still have to work on the social or cultural level. And social change can only happen in a very slow, evolutionary manner. Before we can pass laws, such as requiring girls to complete* tawjihi *or restricting the marriage age to 18, we have to change the customs and norms of society. For example, families believe that if they invest their money in a son's education, they will benefit because he will always support them, while they think investing in education for girls is just frivolous since the girls will get married and leave home. So we have to work hard on parents about the importance of educating their daughters. Moreover, even if the government passed such laws, it couldn't effectively intervene in families to implement them. Personally, I strongly support a government law requiring girls to finish* tawjihi, *but I have real doubts about whether it would make any difference. The same with marriage age. I think early marriage is a crime—14- and 15-year-old girls are still children. I think the minimum age for women should be 20, not 18. But realistically, I don't think the government could effectively interfere with a family's decision to marry a girl at any age regardless of the existence of a law. The problem is the culture and customs of this society—it has nothing to do with religion. It's our traditions and their incredible persistence. We must work on changing these through grassroots education. From my perspective, this is the main goal of this center. . . . But let's consider some issues from another perspective. The government authority is not separate from the people; it is representative of the people. So the government and the people are integrated. Some women in Ramallah and Jerusalem are proposing that the government pass a law giving women the "right" to work. But if the type of work the women wants to do is constructive, if it will improve her character and give her financial benefit—if it's good work—then you don't need a government law to interfere. Her case will be convincing by itself and her family will eventually agree. If the work isn't good, why should the government even try to interfere to force a family to per-*

*mit a daughter to work. . . . I'm opposed to the idea of civil marriage and divorce. These are religious matters—whether Muslim or Christian—and the government should not interfere. There are some Islamic laws that could be manipulated more effectively to help women get a divorce. But divorce itself should remain in the province of religion. Look, all slogans about male and female equality are just empty talk because in reality men have so many more rights. So if you ask for equality in divorce you are raising an empty slogan. I don't see the purpose in that. . . . A law punishing a man for beating his wife? No, I don't think so. If I am married and my husband beats me, I will immediately leave the house. Beating is a humiliation that no woman should have to bear. But, again the issue is related to culture. There are so many women who are beaten but who never talk about it for fear that if their husband knew they talked, the husband will divorce them and they will lose their children and home. So how can we talk about a law to punish men when women can't even talk about their situation to a neighbor or relative. I don't know; maybe a law would help. But it would take a long time to have any effect, tradition is so strong here. We have to begin by teaching women that men do not have the right to beat them—not according to Sharia or anything else. And we have to teach men to respect women as equals and as human beings. No man would tolerate being beaten so he must learn that he cannot beat women. . . . In any case, before any laws are passed, there has to be tremendous preparation for such laws. For example, policymakers have to understand what's going on in society and put priorities according to the needs and demands of society, because just having a law on paper will not automatically change anything. There have to be major consciousness-raising campaigns among all the people, throughout all sectors of society—in every village and camp and with every class. Otherwise, society's traditional norms and customs will destroy or negate such laws. . . . I believe the center here, in its own small way, is helping the women who come to it improve their lives. They learn skills, and most go on to earn money. They develop self-confidence and their characters become stronger. They learn that they have rights as human beings and they learn that they must stand up for those rights. Most women who come here become better able to deal with their husbands, in-laws, whoever. And they learn that women can interact and share their problems without fear of gossip or ridicule, and that they are not the only ones suffering. These may not seem like major things, but I believe these are the important first steps.*

—Rita

Soraya believes that change begins with engaging women and raising their awareness that their situation could be better.

*The women who say there is no need for change in this society definitely have a problem themselves because they are unable to see things clearly. I think this is where we must start. We must engage these women and question them as to what they mean when they say everything is okay and there's no need for change. I'm sure that every single woman can see problems, but it's a matter of an inability to express herself either descriptively or analytically. That's our responsibility as a women's center—to question these women*

*through our home visits, seminars, lectures and consciousness-raising campaigns. Women are so isolated here—in their homes, in their neighborhoods, in their villages or camps, wherever, and they live with the norms by which they were socialized and can't see anything else. For them, that's life, that's all there is. We have to expose them to new ways of thinking.*

Soraya sees each connection as sparking others:

*I strongly believe that every community—including the smallest rural village—has at least one woman who thinks the same as we do. We can work with this one woman, help her to bring another, then another and in this way we can transform people's thinking. For example, I've worked with some women from El Misrah Garbia, a small village near Birzeit on the road to Kubar. They have lots of really beautiful Palestinian embroidery and I encouraged, then assisted, them in marketing it. I helped them establish a small women's committee to do the work of marketing. They are doing it now and I'm sure this kernel of economic organization will also become a social organization and the women will be transformed by their experiences in it. I'm sure there is something similar—some kernel with which to begin working—in every corner of the West Bank. It's our job to go out and find it, to make the connections, and provide advice and assistance. . . . We can work in education too. That's very important. If we can go into the girls' schools and talk with the students, we can catch them early and begin to influence them. . . . I disagree with those who say that laws are useless. If we have a law, and we've worked for this law, we'll face problems of course, and it won't be easy to implement the laws. But laws will definitely help. Of course law by itself won't work. It must be accompanied by a consciousness-raising campaign. If we start, for example, talking with very young girls about the importance of completing* tawjihi *combined with the fact that there is a law, and that it is their right to finish their education, this will help to strengthen the character of the girls and enable them to stand up to their families if they try to force them out of school. . . . I understand the taboo against speaking about domestic violence. But this must be broken. No woman should allow a man to beat her. She should take him to court no matter what. That's also an issue on which we have to work at raising women's consciousness.*

—Soraya

Clearly, Rita and Soraya have given considerable thought to the problems women face and to ways to ameliorate them. Moreover, they have not just pondered the problems in the abstract, but have worked extremely hard to put their ideas into practice in their center. They do so at considerable cost, since many camp residents—men and women alike—are critical, even hostile, to the center and the women who are active in it. Um Wassim's comments are typical.

*I've never gone to the center but I don't like what they are doing there. They think they are "liberated women." We don't need liberated women in this*

*camp—it's bad enough there are so many in Ramallah and El Bireh. We want to preserve our traditions and customs here. We want our daughters to be good girls and do what is right. I don't like the fancy ideas they put in girls' heads. Worse, they are encouraging mixing between boys and girls. That's shameful.*

—Um Wassim, 35, married with nine children, "very observant" Muslim, completed eighth grade

Soraya and Ahdaf describe the men's attitudes.

*The men don't like the idea of a women's center. They are afraid that women who come here will get "liberal" ideas and be less submissive at home. They are afraid they will lose some of their control over their wives and daughters. So they say bad things about the women who come here. They try to convince people we are bad women and discourage them from coming to the center. They say a girl who comes here will be polluted by our ideas. It makes me very angry. And it's so hard to fight gossip and innuendo.*

—Soraya

*You know the men here have had a center since 1985. We didn't get ours until 1993. Ours is much better organized, we offer better programs, and really good training courses, and we provide a lot of services to the camp. But instead of respecting our center, the men can't stand that we are doing something independent of their control, so they spread rumors about the women who work or come here. They're trying to destroy the women's center. Women have to have extremely strong characters to withstand such attacks. Not many do. I've been the target of some very bad talk. It hurt a lot, I'll admit. But I know I haven't engaged in any bad behavior and I'm not going to just shut myself up in my house. I go to the center regularly. I've taken several training courses and now I'm in the karate class. I really love that.*

—Ahdaf, 20, single, camp resident, "not at all religious" Muslim, completed ninth grade

Nevertheless, the women persist. Moreover, in informal conversations, several male camp leaders expressed to me a growing, if grudging, respect for what the women are doing in the centers.

Many women in Al-Am'ari camp report the center there has a positive impact on their lives. Um Muriad, whose story was told on pages 195–196, Chapter 6, remarked:

*I believe all women's problems can be solved through women's centers. This one helped me in so many ways. It gave me skills, emotional encouragement and support, and a small loan to help me get started. The center is especially important for the young girls in the camp because they can go there and talk with someone privately and get help with their problems. The women from the center often go to a girl's home, at her request, and talk with her parents about not forcing her out of school or into an early marriage. They have*

*helped a lot of young girls this way and I think this is something really important. Actually, my secret dream has always been to be a social worker and help people with their problems. It's very good that the center is doing these things.*

—Um Muriad, 35, married with six children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed ninth grade

Another woman participates in the center and encourages her 16-year-old daughter to be active too:

*I've been a member of the women's center since it opened. It's a great place. I come often and I encourage Noona to come too. Last year she took a class in ceramics and made many beautiful pieces. I come for meetings, discussions, and seminars. Sometimes, when I have some free time, I come just to chat with the women. . . . No, Noona doesn't face any gossip for coming here because we live right beside the center so she hardly has to go "out" to come here. . . . I think the main purpose for the center is for socializing. Talking with other women about common problems in a safe environment is very good. Just staying at home in isolation is bad.*

—Um Mustafa, 52, married with 9 children, camp resident, "very observant" Muslim, completed fifth grade

And, from a young woman:

*There are so many problems for women in this society—school dropouts, early marriage, forced marriage, and the way we're brought up to fear boys. I've been coming to this center for a year and I think what they are doing is very good—especially the mixed activities. We had some mixed activities at the summer camp last year—mainly sports and it was very good. If we want to solve the problems in marriages, we have to work on the young generation. We have to teach boys and girls to be friends and to trust each other. Boys and girls need a little space to interact normally before being pushed into marriage. I know many people in the camp don't like it, but I think it's a good thing.*

—Awha, 16, single, camp resident, "observant" Muslim, in tenth grade

Another positive comment came from a sewing teacher who is employed by the center. She wears the *jilbaab* and lives in El Bireh.

*I think the center is very important for the camp. They are providing many good services. Unfortunately, too many women in the camp don't understand what is going on here and promote bad ideas about the women who are involved. Personally, working here has been a very valuable experience for me. I used to think that all camp women were stupid, simple-minded, and crass. But since working here and interacting with these women, I've learned a lot of things from them; I see they are good, capable human*

*beings. I'm very appreciative of this experience and very supportive of the center.*

—Dalal, 24, single, city resident, "very observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma in sewing

Another center employee who lives outside the camp related:

*I am a teacher in a nearby secondary school, but when I'm not at work or studying for a course, I give this center all my time because I believe it is doing something very important. I work in the summer camps especially in the sports activities. I train girls in sports all year. I participate in the home visits, attend all the meetings and lectures, and I bring work for the women. I have some good contacts in Jerusalem so I bring sewing and the women earn good money for it. They're trained very well here. Personally, participating in the center has been a very enriching experience for me. I came here, thinking like everyone else outside the camps, that all camp women are uneducated, vulgar, overbearing, dirty, and don't even know how to talk. But I changed my attitude very quickly. The women at this center are the best friends I've ever had and I come here as much to socialize with them as to earn extra money. I hope this center will become very strong and be a model for other centers and perhaps contribute to changing some of the stereotypes in this society.*

—Sayyida, 30, single, lives outside the camp, "observant" Muslim, *tawjihi* plus two-year diploma

It is apparent that the women's center in Al-Am'ari camp is engaged in significant gender-related activities. The center faces many problems, but the women who run it are committed, have very strong characters, and will not give up unless they are forced to by a complete cut off of UNRWA funds—an issue that is entirely out of their hands. This center could prove to be the catalyst for the process of transforming power inequalities and gender relations among men and women in Al-Am'ari camp. It is also highly significant that very observant, *jilbaab*-clad women employed by the center have so much respect for the work that it is doing. It seems that while not all West Bank Muslims want to live in an Islamic state per se, the majority do not want a completely secular Westernized society either. In the words of one analyst, "The masses want neither democracy without Islam, nor Islam without democracy; they want to have them both combined."[49] The women's center in Al-Amari provides a functional example of such a solution.

* * *

In general, women's centers have great potential for raising women's consciousness and instilling skills and self-confidence. At minimum, the centers

provide a place where women can "break the silence." They can talk with each other about their problems in a safe environment free of destructive social gossip. This is as evident from the comments of the Muslim Sisters about the center in their camp as from the women in Al-Am'ari. The introduction of counseling and home visits in Al-Am'ari is an enormously important innovation in a society that negatively stereotypes psychological services.

It is interesting to observe the strong similarities between the women from Al-Am'ari and the Muslim Sisters in terms of their understanding of social problems as well as their tactics for solutions. Where they differ, of course, is on the establishment of an Islamic state. Nevertheless, the positive experiences Dalal (and other observant women) have had with the center could provide a starting point for finding common ground.

## CONCLUSION

The current position of camp and village women is a consequence of several interlocking factors: the general political malaise; the factionalism of patriarchal kinship and camp and village women's traditional reluctance to engage in social relations outside their kinship group; the gendered nature of the nationalist movement, including its class bias; the rise of the Islamist movement; and, most important, the absence of an organized, sustained women's movement focused on gender issues.

Social and cultural discourses and practices foreordained the failure of the traditional women's committees. Without a systematic analysis of the nature and structure of power relations in Palestinian society—beginning with the family—and a concomitant project to transform those relations starting at the family level, it is difficult to imagine how any "feminist" project could have succeeded.[50] The problem with the traditional Palestinian women's movement was essentially its failure to directly challenge patriarchal power relations and the ideologies that legitimize them—at *all* institutional levels. The real issue in politics *is* at the site where power constrains human subjects by articulating for them an identity. If that basic identity is not transformed in the context of transforming social institutions and gender discourses, women can never hope to be agents of their own destiny. Moreover, if as Butler argues, agency is always and only a political prerogative,[51] and if it is clear that agency resides solely with the masculine in Palestinian society, it begs the question of what could be accomplished through women's mobilization on the basis of existing configurations of discourse and power.

The women in my research community who are now involved either with the Muslim Sisters or the women's center in al-Am'ari appear to understand far more clearly than the urban activists that the core of women's problems

resides in patriarchy. Whether they will be able to transform the structures and relations of patriarchy in West Bank rural and camp society is a question future analysts will have to answer.

## NOTES

1. For a listing of the most valuable works on Palestinian women, see the list I have provided in note 2 following the Introduction. For a specific comment on women's groups and civil society in the post-Oslo period, see Graham Usher, *Palestine in Crisis: The Struggle for Peace and Political Independence After Oslo* (London: Pluto Press, in association with the Transnational Institute and the Middle East Research and Information Project, 1995), pp. 43–56.

2. There are several small groups in addition to the ones listed in Table 7.1, but they have operated almost exclusively outside the West Bank and have had little influence on West Bank politics. They have included Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command; as-Saiqa; Palestine Liberation Front; Arab Liberation Front; Fateh Uprising; Palestine Popular Struggle Front; Rejectionist Front; Palestinian National Salvation Front; and Black September Organization.

3. See, for example, Rema Hammami and Eileen Kuttab, "The Palestinian Women's Movement: Strategies Towards Freedom and Democracy," *News from Within* (Jerusalem, Israeli monthly, English), April 1999, pp. 3–9; Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson, "Intifada Year Four: Notes on the Women's Movement," in Suha Sabbagh, ed., *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), pp. 216–230; Islah Jad, "The Feminist Movement in Palestine," in Nadia al-Afifi Abdel Wahab and Amal Abdel Hadi, eds., *The Feminist Movement in the Arab World: Interventions and Studies from Four Countries* (Cairo: Dar El-Mostaqbal Al Arabi, 1996), pp. 135–203; Zahira Kamal, "The Development of the Palestinian Women's Movement in the Occupied Territories: Twenty Years After the Occupation," in Sabbagh, ed., *Palestinian Women of Gaza and the West Bank,* pp. 78–90; Rita Giacaman and Penny Johnson, "Searching for Strategies: The Palestinian Women's Movement in the New Era," *Middle East Report* 24, no. 1 (January-February 1994): 22–26.

4. A particularly useful edited book that addresses all these issues is Mahnaz Afkhami and Erika Friedl, eds., *Muslim Women and the Politics of Participation: Implementing the Beijing Platform* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997). Also, more specifically with regard to Palestinian women and these issues, see Rosemary Sayigh, "Encounters with Palestinian Women Under Occupation," in Elizabeth Warnock Fernea, ed., *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), pp. 191–208.

5. Giacaman and Johnson, "Intifada Year Four," p. 228.

6. Valentine M. Moghadam, "Introduction and Overview," in Moghadam, ed., *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books, 1994), p. 2. For a good overall analysis, see Nira Yuval-Davis and Floya Anthias, eds., *Woman-Nation-State* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

7. Julie Peteet, "No Going Back?: Women and the Palestinian Movement," *Middle East Report* 16, no. 1 (January-February 1986): 20–24.

8. See, for example, Helena Cobbana, *The Palestine Liberation Organization: People, Power and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

9. Many analysts have made similar arguments. See Joseph Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine: Gender and Palestinian Nationalism," *Middle East Journal* 49, no. 3 (Summer, 1995): 467–483; Sherna Berger Gluck, "Palestinian Women: Gender Politics and Nationalism," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 24, no. 3 (Spring 1995): 5–15; Nahla Abdo, "Women and the Intifada: Gender, Class, and National Liberation," *Race and Class* 32, no. 4 (1991): 19–34; and Rita Giacaman, in an interview with Graham Usher, "Palestinian Women, the Intifada, and the State of Independence: An Interview with Graham Usher," *Race and Class* 34, no. 3 (1992): 31–43.

10. Peteet, "Women and the Palestinian Movement," pp. 22, 24.

11. Massad, "Conceiving the Masculine," pp. 467–483, esp. 472–473.

12. Ibid., p. 474.

13. Ibid., pp. 475–476.

14. Jad, "The Feminist Movement in Palestine," p. 151.

15. Kamal, "The Development of the Palestinian Women's Movement in the Occupied Territories," pp. 87–88. I interviewed Zahira Kamal, general director, Directorate of Gender Planning and Development, Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, PA, Ramallah, October 3, 1997, and found her quite disillusioned about every aspect of women and politics.

16. Rita Giacaman, "Palestinian Women in the Uprising: From the Followers to Leaders," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 2, no. 1 (1989): 140, quoted in Maria Holt, *Women in Contemporary Palestine: Between Old Conflicts and New Realities* (East Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs [PASSIA], 1996), p. 35. Also see Giacaman and Johnson, "Searching for Strategies," pp. 22–26.

17. See, for example, Suha Sabbagh, "Palestinian Women and Institution Building," in Sabbagh, ed., *Arab Women: Between Defiance and Resistance* (New York: Olive Branch Press, 1996), pp. 107–114.

18. See, for example, Rana Salibi, "Women's Activities in Popular Committees During the Intifada," in Ebba Augustin, ed., *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1993), pp. 165–170. For a good analysis of the popular organizations with regard to health care, see Mustafa Barghouthi and Rita Giacaman, "The Emergence of an Infrastructure of Resistance: The Case of Health," in Jamal R. Nassar and Roger Heacock, eds., *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), pp. 73–90.

19. For a rather more sympathetic analysis, see Eileen Kuttab, "Palestinian Women in the Intifada: Fighting on Two Fronts," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 63–79; pp. 80–84 of the same article are more critical.

20. Jad, "The Feminist Movement in Palestine," pp. 158–159.

21. Through direct personal experience, I can attest to this issue. I sent money through a woman's group in the United States specifically designated for a particular extremely impoverished family from Breij camp in Gaza with three sons in prison. I'd come to know them well during the period I lived there. When I learned the family had never received the money—a considerable sum—I was outraged that a party I had previously respected was apparently not fulfilling its promises; I went to Gaza and confronted the responsible local leaders. They acknowledged knowing that a specific family designation had been made from money they received from the United States but said they had to distribute the money to all the needy. They could not provide me with a list of families who had received the money, but after considerable effort on my part, the family received the full amount I had sent.

22. The major questions framing this analysis are inspired by Suad Joseph, "Women and Politics in the Middle East," *Middle East Report* 16, no. 1 (January-Feb-

ruary 1986): 3–8. Also useful in this respect was Peteet, "Women and the Palestinian Movement," pp. 20–24.

23. See the analysis by Lisa Taraki, "The Development of Political Consciousness Among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, 1967–1987," in Nassar and Heacock, eds., *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads,* pp. 53–71.

24. The Palestinian Model Parliament on Women and Legislation was organized by the WCLAC, which hoped to produce "model" laws on citizenship, travel rights, labor rights, rape, education, and honor killings as well as on various aspects of women's rights in marriage, divorce, and maintenance. The project aimed at educating the Palestinian public about issues of personal status especially as regards women, and ultimately to affect decisions of the Legislative Council in writing personal status and other laws pertaining to women. The Model Parliament was held at a time when there was no discussion, in any quarter, about visions for the future of Palestinian society. In this sense, the fact that it was held at all is highly significant. Suzanne Ruggi, "Pillars of Democracy: A Stake in the Future," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), March 27, 1998, p. 7; Khader Abusway, "Debating Problems and Demanding Change: Women's Parliament Holds Plenary Session," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), April 3, 1998, pp. 4–5, 7.

25. See, for example, Said Ghazali, "Wrangles Over Women's Status Unearths Deep Conflicts," *Jerusalem Times* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), April 3, 1998, p. 7; Graham Usher, "A Victory Nevertheless," *Al-Ahram* (Cairo, weekly supplement, English), April 2–8, 1998, p. 4.; Amira Hass, "16,000 Signatures for the Devil's Daughter," *Ha'aretz Week's End* (Jerusalem, Israeli weekly, English), May 8, 1998, p. 11.

26. On the general changes brought to Palestinian politics after the coming of the PA, see Jamil Hilal, "The Effect of the Oslo Agreement on the Palestinian Political System," in George Giacaman and Dag Jorund Lonning, eds., *After Oslo: New Realities, Old Problems* (London: Pluto Press, 1998), pp. 121–145; and Graham Usher, "The Politics of Internal Security: The Palestinian Authorities New Security Services," in Giacaman and Lonning, eds., *After Oslo,* pp. 146–161.

27. For an analysis of the role of NGOs and women's issues in this period, see Rema Hammami, "Palestinian NGOs Since Oslo: From NGO Politics to Social Movements?" *Middle East Report* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 16–19, 27, 48.

28. See the analysis by Iyad Barghouti, "The Islamists in the Occupied Territories," interview with Lisa Hajjar, *Middle East Report* 23, no. 4 (July-August 1993): 9–12. Also see Usher, *Palestine in Crisis,* pp. 25–34; and Holt, *Women in Contemporary Palestine,* pp. 38–64.

29. Jean-François Legrain, "The Islamic Movement and the Intifada," in Nassar and Heacock, eds., *Intifada*, pp. 175–190; Rema Hammami, "From Immodesty to Collaboration: Hamas, the Women's Movement, and National Identity in the Intifada," in Joel Beinin and Joe Stork, eds., *Political Islam: Essays from Middle East Report* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 194–210. Also see Souad Dajani, "Between National and Social Liberation: The Palestinian Women's Movement in the Israeli Occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip," in Tamar Mayer, ed., *Women and the Israeli Occupation: the Politics of Change* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 44–46; and Jad, "The Feminist Movement in Palestine," pp. 179–180.

30. Jad, "The Feminist Movement in Palestine," p. 179.

31. Rema Hammami, "Women, the *Hijab,* and the Intifada," *Middle East Report* 20, nos. 3–4 (May-June/July-August, 1990): 25–26.

32. Hammami, "From Immodesty to Collaboration," p. 201.

33. See, for example, Amira Hass, "A New Eve for Islamic Women," *Ha'aretz Week's End* (Jerusalem, Israeli weekly, English), August 7, 1998, p. B4, reporting on an Islamist gathering of 1,200, 80 percent of whom were women wearing the *hijab* or *jilbaab,* at a conference in Gaza organized by the Islamic National Salvation Party, al-Halas, at the end of July 1998.

34. The poll was conducted according to Kish Tables: 36 percent came from villages, 16 percent from refugee camps, and 46 percent from towns/cities. The male-female ratio was 49.1 percent to 50 percent. In terms of marital status, 65 percent were married, 27 percent single, 4 percent widowed, and 2 percent divorced. The average age of the respondents was 34. In terms of occupation, 11.4 percent were students, 13.8 percent laborers, 35.9 percent housewives, 15.0 percent municipal employees (teachers, nurses, et cetera), 1.6 percent professionals, 9.4 percent business people, with the remainder divided among farmers, artisans, the unemployed, and the retired.

35. "Palestinians on Politics," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly, English), April 9, 1999, pp. 6–10.

36. Ziad Abu Nada and Ayman Jadallah, "Islamic Blocs Take Student Councils," *Palestine Report* (Jerusalem, Palestinian weekly English), April 9, 1999, p. 11.

37. Sara Roy, "The Transformation of Islamic NGOs in Palestine," *Middle East Report* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2000): p. 25.

38. See, for example, Heba Ra'uf Ezzat, "It's Time to Launch a New Women's Liberation Movement—an Islamic One," *Middle East Report* 24, no. 6 (November-December 1994), pp. 26–27.

39. For several analyses of Hamas, see Andrea Nusse, *Muslim Palestine: The Ideology of Hamas* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998); Beverley Milton-Edwards, *Islamic Politics in Palestine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996); and Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: the Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

40. Hass, "A New Eve for Islamic Women."

41. See, for example, the analysis by Valentine M. Moghadam, "Islamist Movements and Women's Responses in the Middle East," *Gender and History* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1991): 268–284; and Abdullahi An'Naim, "The Dichotomy Between Religious and Secular Discourse in Islamic Societies," in Mahnaz Afkhami, ed., *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), pp. 51–60.

42. Kandiyoti, "Reflections on the Politics of Gender in Muslim Societies," in Afkhami, *Faith and Freedom,* pp. 20–21.

43. Lela Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 194–202. Also see Jan Goodwin, *Price of Honor: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence on the Islamic World* (New York: Penguin/Plume, 1994), pp. 225–228.

44. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam,* p. 194.

45. Ibid., p. 66.

46. Fatima Mernissi, *The Veil and the Male Elite: A Feminist Interpretation of Women's Rights in Islam* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1987), p. 164ff. For a considerably different yet highly useful perspective, see Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Islam and Equality: Debating the Future of Women's and Minority Rights in the Middle East and North Africa* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1999).

47. For several analyses of Islam, women, and rights, see Ruth Roded, ed., *Women in Islam and the Middle East: A Reader* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1999); Carolyn

Fluehr-Lobban, *Islamic Society in Practice* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994); and Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam, Gender, and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) (contains many important essays). The issue of male misrepresentation of the original teachings of the prophet Muhammad, and of the Word of God given to Muhammad (the Quran), as well as the greater freedoms women had under Islam in earlier centuries, has been the subject of much recent research. In addition to the work already cited, see Amira El-Azhary Sonbol, ed., *Women, the Family and Divorce Laws in Islamic History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1996)—contains many excellent essays. Also see Gavin R. G. Hambly, *Women in the Medieval Islamic World: Power, Patronage, and Piety* (New York: St. Martins Press 1998); Beverly B. Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u: Scholar and Scribe* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Fatima Mernissi, *The Forgotten Queens of Islam* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); D. A. Spellberg, *Politics, Gender, and the Islamic Past: The Legacy of A'isha Bint Abi Bakr* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); Judith Tucker, *In the House of the Law: Gender and Islamic Law in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); and Judith E. Tucker., ed., *Arab Women: Old Boundaries, New Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993)—this too contains a number of relevant and important essays. Also see Wiebke Walther, *Women in Islam: From Medieval to Modern Times* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1995); and the references in note 1, Chapter 5.

48. PCBS, *Small Area Population, Revised Estimates for 1996* (Ramallah, West Bank, Palestine: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 1996), p. 20.

49. Khalid Amayreh, "Where Edward Said Got It Wrong," online at oiap@egroups.com/ahmed_benani@urbanet.ch, July 20, 2000.

50. A scholarly article that purports to evaluate the Palestinian women's movement but falls short on all these issues is Rabab Abdulhadi, "The Palestinian Women's Autonomous Movement: Emergence, Dynamics, and Challenges," *Gender and Society* 12, no. 6 (December 1998): 649–673.

51. Judith Butler, "Contingent Foundations: Feminism and the Question of 'Postmodernism,'" in Butler and Joan W. Scott, eds., *Feminists Theorize the Political* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 13.

# 8

# Conclusion: West Bank Camp and Village Women—Outlook for the Future

Privileging the voices and experiences of West Bank camp and village women has demonstrated that the core of gender inequality in this society resides in patriarchal control and repression of female sexuality. The political and economic utility of this construct is clear. The control of female sexuality maintains male power, privileges, and prerogatives. It guarantees perpetuation of the patriline. It is understood that the purpose of marriage, preferably among paternal agnates, is not to unite two people in an intimate relationship but to produce sons or male heirs. Authority over female bodies enhances male governorship of the exchange and the transfer of wealth and property. In short, regulating female sexuality ensures the continuation of the family, the primary site of male domination, which in turn prefigures and conditions the persistence of male dominance in all other social institutions—an effective design for reproducing patriarchy. The repression of female sexuality also validates male honor—of particular salience within my research community, where for the past half-century males have been unable to demonstrate other important aspects of the traditional, highly valued male honor code. This has occurred as a consequence of the loss of land as well as of its declining importance in terms of honor, plus the political and economic circumstances that have made it difficult, if not impossible, for males to exercise most aspects of the male honor code—independence, assertiveness, autonomy, generosity, or any other honorable trait. Control of women is the most important, if not the only, component of the honor code left to men in this historical moment.

The persistence of local patriarchy or, more accurately, its distortion in neopatriarchy is related to another set of power relations—that of occupier and occupied in a settler-colonial system. The systematic edifice of repression

established under the occupation has had an enormous and deleterious effect on gender roles and relations as well as on women's life situations in general. It is the interaction of the ever shifting mix of external elements, over which women have absolutely no control, with local traditions and culture that has been so detrimental to the women in my research community. The occupation has involved Israel's control of all the land and water resources in the context of absolute political and economic domination. Since 1967, the Palestinian agricultural sector has declined markedly, while Israel has simultaneously prohibited any industrial development. This policy has led to male migration to foreign countries in search of employment and decent wages, resulting in significant alterations in family patterns and particular hardships for women. The absence of industrialization has also precluded the possibility of greater female labor force participation. Israel's purposeful structural "de-development" or perpetuation of underdevelopment in the West Bank, combined with its total closure of the territories after 1993, has resulted in large-scale male unemployment and growing misery, especially in the camps and villages, forcing families to limit their daughters' life choices in numerous ways.

Israel's restrictions, throughout the occupation, on the development of educational and health care facilities are largely responsible for the substandard quality of health care as well as for many of the problems in the educational system. Its control of all water resources and its restrictions on Palestinian water usage has impaired the quality of water Palestinians do have access to, creating numerous health problems for women (as well as for the entire West Bank population). Israel has intentionally polluted the environment and has promoted the use of pesticides—both of which have been injurious to women's health. Its policies during the intifada (and since) have put women's general health and the viability of their pregnancies at risk through the indiscriminate use of tear gas and the interdiction of their access to existing facilities through roadblocks and closures. It also subjected women to shootings, killings, arrests, and imprisonment while massively inflicting these policies on men, thus greatly increasing the number of female-headed households. Soldiers manipulated women's fear of *iskat,* leading to increased female immurement, early school dropouts, early marriages, and further impediments to women's freedom of movement. Israel's policy of house demolitions has had devastating effects on women. Ultimately, the combined hardships of the occupation have reinforced the traditional patriarchal family and women's dependence and subjugation.

Other external factors have also negatively affected women. Although in West Bank camp and village society the oppression of women is a fact first inscribed in poverty, destitution and the increasing impoverishment of the area are integral aspects of the "new" globalism.[1] Deprivation in the West Bank is not only a consequence of local conditions and economic dependence

on Israel but is also related to international economic and political power dynamics and the policies of international financial institutions, especially the strings they attach to financial contributions to local NGOs. Like other Middle Eastern Arab states, the West Bank is being deeply and negatively affected by the growing global Darwinism reflected in undisciplined worldwide capitalism. The dominance of the United States and its multiple arms—for example, USAID, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank—do not encourage social equality or advance democratization. Instead, the gap between elites and masses is widening and poverty is spreading at the same time that the authoritarianism of the PA is increasing.[2] These trends at the societal level are, in turn, being replicated in the family and other local institutions. NGOs themselves, as a result of their increasing reliance on foreign funding and concomitant need to devise development-oriented programs, are either irrelevant to camp and village women's needs or actually harmful—such as their refusal to fund infertility programs. Each of these factors negatively affects gender relations and reinforces patterns of inequality. None bode well for positive transformations in the lives of village and camp women.

The myriad dimensions of gender inequality are evident in all the social relations in which my respondents daily engage. These include the nature of identity formation and maintenance, child-rearing practices, educational choices and opportunities, choice of a marriage partner, marital roles and relations, freedom of movement, employment opportunities, divorce and polygamy, legal guardianship of children, inheritance and property ownership, sanctioned violence, punishments for violations of the honor code, and others. In all of these, it is evident that women are distinctly positioned and men are privileged. Yet, as noted, the roles, relations, and positions of women are not solely a consequence of domestic institutions and discourses. The interaction among local ingredients and external forces has contributed to the deformation, transformation, and reformation of kinship relations, familial relationality and connectivity, class, and every other aspect of women's social reality.

The existence and operation of hierarchical power relations in local social institutions have a momentous effect on the construction and reproduction of gendered identities, hierarchies, and inequalities. The elementary relations of power in defined institutions, combined with their disciplinary techniques, construct and reproduce female identities and roles through the categorizing, positioning, and subordination of West Bank camp and village women.[3] The ascending hierarchies of institutionalized power relations—male/female, father/daughter, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law, husband/wife, teacher/student, employer/employee, health care provider/patient, masculine-dominated political factions/female followers—progressively constitute and reconstitute "female" individuals or "subjects."

The technologies of power operate as a lattice or web concurrently oppressing women and producing oppressive behaviors by women, making plain that women are not simply power's inert victims. Rather, they are always in the position of simultaneously submitting to and exercising power. From the moment of a child's birth, women socialize both their daughters and sons to assume traditional roles and relations. Many women accept that society has the right to judge them. Women gossip. Women ostracize divorcées. Some women believe that men have a right to beat them. In addition, many women collaborate in the system of patriarchy by willingly assuming the role of matriarch at the first opportune moment.

Power functions in a variety of ways—to produce behaviors, meanings, and significations, and to create discourses and disciplines. The mechanisms of power could not be effectively exercised without legitimating discourses of "truth." The most important of these are the discourses of honor and shame, complementarity, patriarchal kinship connectivity and relationality, the potential *qaid* power of the female, and male rationality versus female emotionality. These discourses have, in turn, been reified into disciplines—total symbolic universes that encompass all institutional realms and provide the ultimate justification for the whole social order. Disciplines too are the products of power, and in West Bank camp and village society, the most important are tradition, culture, religion, and law.

The mechanisms and disciplines of power operate in every institution (for example, the family, religious establishments, the education and health care systems, the labor sector, and political factions and women's committees) to construct, reinforce, and reproduce male dominance and female subordination. The list is virtually endless, but some examples from each institution will serve to highlight the working of political technologies and ideologies throughout the social body. It is the repeated enactment of these political rituals of power that in turn reinforces the nonegalitarian, asymmetrical relations of oppression.

Society, the collection of all the institutions and all the individuals who inhabit it, although humanely created, assumes a life of its own. Because its institutions, mores, and norms are perceived by those persons who live in it as fixed or given, society has its own mechanisms of power. Indeed, saturating the entire societal field are technologies of power—complementing and reinforcing one another in discursive and disciplinary mechanisms—that produce the "gendered" woman and define the possibilities of her existence. They encompass the preference for male children, the privileging of males in all realms, the "naming" of things that are shameful—such as types of work, behaviors, dress, living alone, and others. Additional societal power mechanisms include gossip, rumors, ostracism, and the linking of the honor of the *hamulah* to the honor of each individual member and determining the honor

of the individual according to that of the clan. Complementing these are bodies of social "truths" that are constituted through the relationship between power and knowledge. One such instance is the direct link between the characterization of the female sex drive as so insatiable and irrational that for the social order to survive, dramatic forms of institutionalized seclusion, segregation, and surveillance, buttressed by severe punishments, are imperative. Inversely, there is the conventional wisdom that the greater the ignorance in which a woman can be held—from knowledge of her body to knowledge of her legal rights—the easier it is to dominate and control her.

The family is the primary site where numerous mechanisms of power operate during the socialization process. The family is the predominant model for the gendered division of labor. Likewise, it is the family that rejoices at the birth of a son and sighs at the birth of a daughter; inculcates female passivity; restricts girls' education; encourages early marriage; arranges marriage; imposes seclusion; restricts women's freedom of movement, choice, and expression; employs violence; and mandates that family matters never be discussed outside the home. In the education system, the most significant mechanisms of control comprise rote learning, memorization, stereotypical textbooks and role models, scholasticism, religious indoctrination, impediments to critical and independent thinking, corporal punishment, limited opportunities for pursuing the secondary science track or vocational training programs, and segregation of girls and boys. Each of these practices, in combination with those from other institutions, acts to further internalize the roles and relations implanted during primary socialization.

The medical institution's most important controlling mechanisms lie in its definition of female "health" as procreation, to the detriment of all other aspects of female physical or psychological well-being, and its focus on the predominance of maternity care to the exclusion of other important services—such as pap smears and mammograms. As such, women's socially designated role as reproducers is reinforced at every stage of their lives. In the labor sector, women are positioned by limited employment opportunities; preference for males over equally or better qualified females; unequal remuneration for equal work; stigmatization of most types of work; consignment of employed women to traditional gender roles; failure to provide day care, paid maternity leaves, or health insurance; and the substitution of paternalism for unions. Excluding women from salaried employment intensifies women's subordination, seclusion, and socially defined role as wife and mother.

In the political sphere, the masculinization of nationalism; the politicization of women's reproductive capacity; the enshrinement of women's "role" as producers, supporters, and sustainers of men; the prioritization of the national question over women's issues; the reproduction of *hamulah* factionalism among political parties; and the collaboration in each of these by the

organized women's committees have considerably increased women's subordination in the 1990s. Legal power mechanisms for Christians encompass prohibitions on divorce, birth control, and abortion. For Muslims, they entail the male prerogatives of unhampered unilateral repudiation and polygamy, coupled with the hindrances on females in obtaining divorce. And both religions designate children as "property" of their fathers. Such laws deepen patrilinality and kinship relations, consigning women to permanent, total dependence on the family. All of these mechanisms reinforce each other and are integrated into each institution at the level of roles, meanings, and "knowledge."

The deep and intense interrelatedness of the various social institutions at the levels of identity, roles, morality, signs, legitimations, law, and "truth" is the most significant and harmful aspect of the entire system for reproducing women's oppression. The force of the socially diffuse but interlinked practices of power lies in defining reality as well as producing it and in the ways by which power and knowledge circulate throughout society to totally integrate the individual woman's identity with her social world. This intense institutional and discursive interconnectedness has obvious and ominous implications for women's ability to change their situation.

In the West Bank, as in any society, there *is* an ongoing process of deformation and reformation. Indeed, society *can* be altered and modified. Yet, in West Bank camp and village society, the depth of the interdependence of the various social institutions and their legitimating discourses in the context of continuous political and economic uncertainty, together with ever looming external threats, suggest that change will not be easy. It will not be accomplished simply by passing a law, issuing a decree, instigating a consciousness-raising campaign, forming a women's group, or the like. It is not that these things are unimportant; on the contrary, every change must begin with small acts, in a specific place at a particular time, undertaken by individuals at the grassroots. Yet, fundamental social change in the West Bank cannot be compartmentalized and will not occur overnight. Since the institutional world is so massively permeated with gender inequalities in so many realms, far-reaching change would require a process of society-wide resocialization involving all institutions and all bodies of legitimating knowledge as well as transformations in individual identities originating in the family.

This, in turn, raises two questions: (1) whether such sweeping and extensive change is possible and (2) whether it is desirable from the perspective of the women in my research community. The first question must remain unanswered—although it should be acknowledged that without optimism there is only paralysis and decay. With regard to the second, the majority of women of all ages with whom I interacted, while desiring specific improvements in particular areas, did not appear to want a complete transformation of their cul-

ture and society. Many women aspired, for example, to complete their education, to work, to have greater freedom of movement, to marry later, to be better acquainted with a prospective groom, to have fewer intrusions from their extended families, to have less interference from their in-laws, to have better health care, to have an improved standard of living, to have more gender equitable marriage and divorce laws, to be free from domestic violence, and so on. Yet, in the main, these women take pride in the basic ingredients of their culture. Whether Christian or Muslim—from nonobservant to very observant—none of my respondents stated that religion was the source of her problems or of the problems of women in society. Most important, while many respondents decried the meddling of extended families and in-laws, the overwhelming majority considered the security, mutual support, and connectedness of the family as something so positive that they would not relinquish it in exchange for personal advantage or individual freedom. Moreover, these women are proud of their morality and their honor and appalled at the sexual licentiousness, drugs, crime, AIDS, and general chaos that color their perceptions of Western women. It is also, I believe, the experiential, historical encounter of West Bank Palestinian-Arab women with Western domination and intervention that contributes to their rejection of Western models and concepts.

In spite of, or perhaps because of, the multiple traumas and changes that have befallen West Bank society since the *nakba,* the patriarchal family remains the most resilient and enduring institution in society today. These calamities include, as noted, dispossession, dispersion, male migration, impoverishment, the disintegration of agriculture as a way of life, commodification, the occupation, the intifada, *ashariyeh* (the revival of "tribalism"), and the general psychological and physical dislocations of any society that is confronting "modernity." Yet, while these forces have caused complex processes of deformation and reformation of the family structure, there has been, in the final analysis, a reproduction—albeit a distorted one—of traditional family roles and relations. Nevertheless, it is surely comprehensible why rural and camp women continue to cleave to the family as the only oasis of stability in an extremely uncertain and chaotic world.

Still, it is the family that is the ontogenesis of patriarchal relations—male authority and domination, and female dependency and oppression—that are, in turn, dispersed and diffused through all the other institutional realms in society. Moreover, the factionalism of the patriarchal *hamulah* system, buttressed by class distinctions, religious sectarianism, political divisions, and partisanship to specific geographical locales, solidifies the family and clan as the only legitimate organization (beyond the PA itself) worthy of loyalty, identity, and participation. The breadth and depth of factionalism in this society, originating in the structure and relations of the *hamulah,* precludes the development of society-wide communal and social relations. This, in turn, hinders

the development of democratic political movements of any sort—in particular, movements for gender equality—since they challenge the very basis of the whole structure of patriarchy. Still, in the end, as the renowned Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi argues, change in Arab society can come only by changing the relations between male and female in social practice—a long-term process involving "new modes of upbringing based on complete equality between men and women in all the stages of life, from birth to death—an equality in rights and duties inside the home and outside it, and in the education of children."[4] Transformations within the family are usually generated through economic and social processes whereby more women are educated, enter the labor force, marry later, have fewer children, and live in nuclear rather than extended families. Yet, the impoverishment and the continuing economic problems in West Bank society militate against such trends. Thus, it is necessary to search for different modes to bring about changes in family relations. Both the Muslim Sisters and the women's center in Al-Am'ari are engaged in grassroots movements to generate such transformations.

As a Westerner (neither an Arab nor a Muslim), I cannot presume to know what my respondents actually need to improve their lives. I believe unequivocally that human rights are universal, honor killing is a crime, and violence against women is unacceptable for any reason.[5] Women have a right to respect, education, equality, social justice, and dignity. Still, I am not willing to tell West Bank women how they should design their path to liberation. I am not even willing to concede that Western women have attained real equality and human dignity. The two forms of grassroots feminist activism percolating through my research community at this time may or may not succeed in their objectives. But at least they are indigenous efforts.

The Muslim Sisters hope to improve the condition of women and alter relations between men and women through an Islamic state governed by Sharia, that is based on original Quranic precepts and modeled on prophet Muhammad's life, practices, and teachings. The leaders of the women's center in Al-Am'ari refugee camp have a pluralist vision of women's role in society that is grounded in an assumption of women's basic humanity and equality. They have actualized this perspective through the establishment of a grassroots women's organization that is attempting both to raise the consciousness of the women in the camp and to provide them with a variety of practical, utilitarian skills to improve their lives. There is much in common between the two movements—especially in their understanding of patriarchy as the source of female oppression. Yet, their approaches and objectives differ sharply. The Al-Am'ari center is striving to transform basic power relations between men and women by concretely demonstrating that women have equal worth and dignity with men and thus should be treated equally in all social relations. The Muslim Sisters are advocating a "reinterpretation" or

"rereading" of sacred texts as a means to bring about a return to the earliest period of the Islamic *ummah.*

Whether one or the other—or neither—of these new forms of feminist activism will prevail is not something that I can predict. From my personal perspective, however, the issue of gender politics and women's rights cannot exist in a vacuum. Women's rights are human rights, and human rights in a state or quasi-state context must proceed from the perspective of citizens' rights within a democracy. The success of any feminist project—however it is defined—cannot occur in the absence of a democratic society wherein all individuals regardless of sex, class, religion, *hamulah,* or geographic locale are considered equal citizens under a just rule of law with equal access to values, resources, and opportunities.

Unfortunately, since the arrival of the PA, the embryonic but developing elements of civil society already present in the West Bank have been seriously undermined, while the PA executive rules with an increasingly authoritarian, undemocratic hand. The legislature is marginalized and the judiciary compromised. The new urban women's organizations (research, leadership training, and legal advice centers) are practically the only remaining remnant of civil society—undoubtedly because they are not perceived as a threat to the authoritarianism now governing the people. Yet, these new NGOs have not reached rural and camp women and, in any case, are advocating policies that most of my respondents view as threats to the family—in particular, secular personal status laws. Moreover, if a genuine democratization process is unsuccessful at a nationwide level and "citizenship" becomes a mockery of itself, a movement for gender equality—however construed—runs the risk of co-optation by the state apparatus. This has been the situation in Syria and Iraq, where the women's groups are little more than political arms of absolutist states. Such an outcome would be a tragedy for both women and men in the West Bank. It provides even greater reason to dismantle the relations of patriarchy within the family so that both women and men can work together from the ground up to undermine the existing patriarchal power relations in each social, economic, and political institution.

It is important to point out that patriarchy not only oppresses women but also positions and fixes men in hierarchical relations of domination and subordination, inculcates patterns of submission to authority, and severely limits men's individual life choices and independent thought. Patriarchy forces many men to leave school early to help support their families, chooses wives for them, and obliges them to obey their fathers (and mothers) even when they are middle-aged men. Their "education" is no more liberating (from traditional values and norms) than is women's. In retrospect (after completing this project), I have come to believe that it is a mistake to ignore the ways in which patriarchy oppresses men as well as women. In so doing, we overlook the

direct relationship between the persistence of patriarchy and political authoritarianism at the state (or quasi-state) level, as well as the perpetuation of economic underdevelopment and class stratification at the social level. It is clear that women cannot expect to be free if men remain shackled to patriarchal hierarchies, ideologies, roles, and obligations. Men are not only the representatives of the patriarchal system that frames and oppresses women; they are its victims, too. As such, patriarchy in its manifold dimensions precludes progress toward social justice and political democratization and impedes economic development, resulting in continuing oppression and inequity for *all* persons within Palestinian society. I am hopeful that future studies of Palestinian and Arab society will extend the analysis of patriarchy to include men as well as women.

## NOTES

1. An entire issue of *Middle East Report* is devoted to these issues with contributions from a variety of experts in the area. See "Reform or Reaction? Dilemmas of Economic Development in the Middle East," *Middle East Report* 29, no. 1 (Spring, 1999).

2. "Reform or Reaction?"

3. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics,* 2d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 143–173, 184–204, 208–226.

4. Nawal Al Saadawi, *Women and Sexuality*, 2d ed. (Beirut: al-Mu'assassa al-Arabiyya, 1972), pp. 18–19, quoted in Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 34.

5. For a good theoretical and empirical analysis, see Ann Elizabeth Mayer, *Islam and Human Rights: Tradition and Politics,* 3d ed. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1999).

# Glossary

Pronunciations of some words differ from rural to urban areas; between the north, central, and south regions; between camps and villages; and a few from village to village.

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| *'agl* | wisdom, social sense, reason, an aspect of maturity |
| *'agla* | a woman who has social sense |
| *aib* | (see *eib*) |
| *'ailah* | functionally extended family |
| *ajnabi'yya* | female foreigner |
| *al-akhawat al-muslimat* | Muslim Sisters |
| *Allah* | God |
| *amti* | paternal aunt; term of deference for mother-in-law |
| *ard* | honor, from owning and/or working land |
| *ashariyeh* | tribalism—reviving the *hamayel* system |
| *dabkeh* | traditional Palestinian folk dance |
| *daya* | traditional midwife |
| *dinar* | basic unit of Jordanian currency (JD); in the late 1990s, the exchange rate was JD 1.00 = U.S.$1.60 |
| *diwan* | special room of a house that is reserved for the husband to entertain or receive male guests |
| *dukkan* or *duka'n* | shop; used colloquially, somewhat derisively, by Palestinian critics of Palestinian NGOs |
| *dunum* | a measure of land; four dunums = 1 acre; 10 dunums = 1 hectare |

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| *iib* or *eib* or *aib* | socially shameful |
| *eid'* | feast |
| *Eid al Adha* | feast at the end of the period of pilgrimage to Mecca |
| *Eid al Fitr* | feast marking the end of Ramadan |
| *fellah* | peasant |
| *fellaheen* | peasants |
| *fiqh* | Islamic jurisprudence, human understanding of divine text |
| *fitna* | chaos, disorder—what women are believed to cause by their presence and existence |
| *gader* | strength, courage, fearlessness, assertiveness—especially in standing up to others; *shoja'a*, more commonly used in Palestinian colloquial |
| *garaba* | female kin |
| *gharibah* or *ghaharabah* | female non-kin |
| *hadith* | the collection of sayings and teachings of Muhammad; part of the Sunna and Sharia |
| *hajj* | pilgrimage to Mecca required of all Muslims, if they are physically capable and financially able, once in their lives, during the specific month of the Muslim lunar calendar in which it is designated |
| *hajji* | woman who has made the hajj |
| *hama* | mother-in-law |
| *hamayel* | clans |
| *hamulah* | clan |
| *Hanafi* | one of the four schools of jurisprudence in Sunnism; West Bank Muslims are under the jurisdiction of this school |
| *haram* | religiously prohibited, therefore shameful |
| *henna* | pulverized leaves of the henna tree used to make a red-dish-black dye for tattooing and coloring hair |
| *hijab* | Muslim head scarf worn by women |
| *hudud* | a crime or offense in which the notion of man's obligation toward God predominates; includes *zina* |
| *iddat* | three-month waiting period—minimum of three menstruations—for a divorced or widowed woman before she is permitted to remarry |
| *iftar* | the meal that breaks the fast during Ramadan |
| *iib* | (see *eib*) |
| *inshallah* | God willing |
| *iskat* or *isqak* | the fear, heightened during the intifada, of Palestinian girls of being secretly photographed in clothing stores or beauty parlors, or of being drugged in cafes or |

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| | restaurants, then sexually abused and turned into informants against male family members |
| *jabal* | mountain |
| *jebneh* | white cheese |
| *jilbaab* | Muslim dress; long, drab, shapeless |
| *jinn* | spirits—good and bad |
| *kadar* | fate—from God |
| *kaid* | (see *qaid*) |
| *kalam en-nas* or *kalam an-nas* | gossip or talk behind one's back |
| *khaddama* | female servant |
| *khalti* or *khaldi* | maternal aunt; term of deference for mother-in-law in Nablus area |
| *khula* | divorce by mutual agreement or female-initiated divorce with husband's consent, whereby the woman must accept irrevocable repudiation and renounce financial claims to deferred dower or maintenance |
| *khutba* | engagement; Muslim betrothal agreement concluded between the families of prospective bride and groom; precedes the *sahih,* which is the marriage contract written with the court |
| *kohl* | fine black powder made of antimony and carefully prepared soot, used to accent women's eyes, especially at weddings |
| *Koran* | (see *Quran*) |
| *mahr* | dowry |
| *mahsoub* | (see *markaz*) |
| *maklubeh* | a traditional Palestinian dish made with layers of tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, onions, garlic, chicken, and rice, and highly seasoned with allspice, pine nuts, and other spices; after it is cooked, it is turned upside down and stands in a perfect mold with the rice on the bottom |
| *mamnou'* | "forbidden"—by law, custom, or tradition, therefore shameful |
| *manabit* | soil; the rich, fecund earth that nourishes the roots of all that is planted in it |
| *mansaf* | traditional Palestinian dish of rice and lamb with yogurt |
| *markaz* or *mahsoub* | social status; used mostly in the urban areas |
| *molokhiah* | a large, tough, protein-rich leafy green plant that when chopped and cooked somewhat resembles spinach—an inexpensive staple of the West Bank diet |

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| *millet* | Turkish for religious community under the sovereignty of a state of another religion in which the community has the right of autonomy in religious, personal status, and other matters that do not come into confrontation with the laws of the sovereign; an invention of the Ottoman Empire; in Arabic, *millah* or *milleh* |
| *muftool* | Palestinian version of couscous |
| *mukhabarat* | one of several internal intelligence or security services of Arab states and the PA |
| *mukhtar* | village headman |
| *mujtama'* or *mushtama* | society |
| *mussakhkhan* | a traditional Palestinian dish served as half of a grilled chicken seasoned with sumac, atop a bed of seasoned sautéed onions and pine nuts on a large, fresh round of bread from the *ta'boun*. |
| *nafaqa* | financial or economic maintenance; required in the Muslim marriage contract for men to provide their wives; also alimony or support for a stipulated period—usually three months—after divorce |
| *nakba* | 1948 disaster |
| *namima* | "bad talk," as in "they are saying bad things about her" |
| *nasab* | literally, relation by marriage or social status deriving from membership in a traditionally prominent *hamulah*; colloquial, especially in the villages and camps, for social status; formally, social status is *al-makanah al-ijtimaiyeh* |
| *naseeb* | fate—from life |
| *qaid* or *kaid* | cunning; power women are believed to have to deceive and defeat men by cunning and intrigue |
| *Quran* | Muslim holy book containing the revelations Allah revealed to the prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel |
| *Ramadan* | the Muslim lunar month of fasting |
| *safeehah* | small round of bread topped with spicy ground meat |
| *sahih* | Muslim marriage contract registered with the Sharia court |
| *sepaneyeh* or *sabanekhiyeh* | small pies filled with spinach, onions, and seasonings |
| *serveece* | public taxi carrying up to nine people |
| *shabab* | young men/boys |
| *sharaf* | honor, from adherence to the norms of the traditional honor code |

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| *Sharia* | Islamic canon law |
| *sheik* | Muslim religious leader, usually an elderly man; often used as a term of respect |
| *Shi'ia* | Muslims who consider Ali and his bloodline the rightful successors to the Prophet—about 9 percent of all Muslims |
| *Shi'ism* | the Muslim sect that believes in Ali and his bloodline as the rightful successors to the Prophet |
| *shoja'a* | courageous; Palestinian colloquial for *gader* |
| *Sunna* | a collection of the sayings/teachings of Muhammad—the *hadith*—plus stories about his life, behavior, and teachings originating from his companions, including commentaries; together the Sunna plus the Quran constitute Islamic Sharia |
| *Sunni* | Muslims who follow the orthodox sect of Islam—about 90 percent of all Muslims |
| *Sunnism* | the orthodox sect of Islam |
| *suq* | market |
| *sura* | a chapter in the Quran |
| *ta'a* | obedience; required of women to their husbands in the Muslim marriage contract |
| *taboun* | traditional outdoor oven for baking bread, built of mud or stone; the fuel is wood, brush, or dried dung, and the flat bread is cooked on hot stones; many village women still bake bread in a *taboun* |
| *tafriq* | a judicial order of separation issued by a Sharia court; female-initiated divorce without husband's consent and without having to give up her rights |
| *talaq* | repudiation; unilateral male-initiated divorce; made outside of court |
| *tawjihi* | standard examination taken at end of twelfth year of school for "certification" |
| *um* | mother of |
| *ummah* | the Muslim community of believers |
| *umra* | a mini-*hajj* that is performed at any time of the year other than the official *hajj* period—most commonly during Ramadan |
| *'urf* | customary law |
| *waasta* | mediation—the use of a personal "connection" with those in positions of power or authority to secure personal favors for another person—a job, a contract, access, or whatever; essentially the "way things work" in Pales- |

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| | tinian society under the PA as well as in other Arab states |
| *za'artar* or *za'ater* | ground wild thyme mixed with a little sumac, sesame seeds, and, depending on the cook, some additional spices; traditionally, Palestinians dip bread into olive oil (*zed*), then into *za'artar* as the mainstay of their breakfast |
| *za'arter* and *jebneh* | small pastries filled with *jebna* (white cheese) and *za'arter* (ground wild thyme) |
| *zina* | adultery; fornication—outside of marriage |

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# About the Book

Cheryl Rubenberg's richly textured analysis provides a case study of the multifaceted and deleterious effects of patriarchy among Palestinians living in the rural villages and refugee camps of theWest Bank: its negative consequences for men as well as women, for democratization, and for progress toward the creation of a more just, equitable, and prosperous society.

Privileging the voices of her interviewees, Rubenberg reveals how external social factors—dispossession, occupation, poverty—have combined with internalized family and kinship structures to exacerbate gender inequalities and women's subordination. Equally important, she also highlights women's successes as they devise strategies to meet the challenges they confront daily.

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